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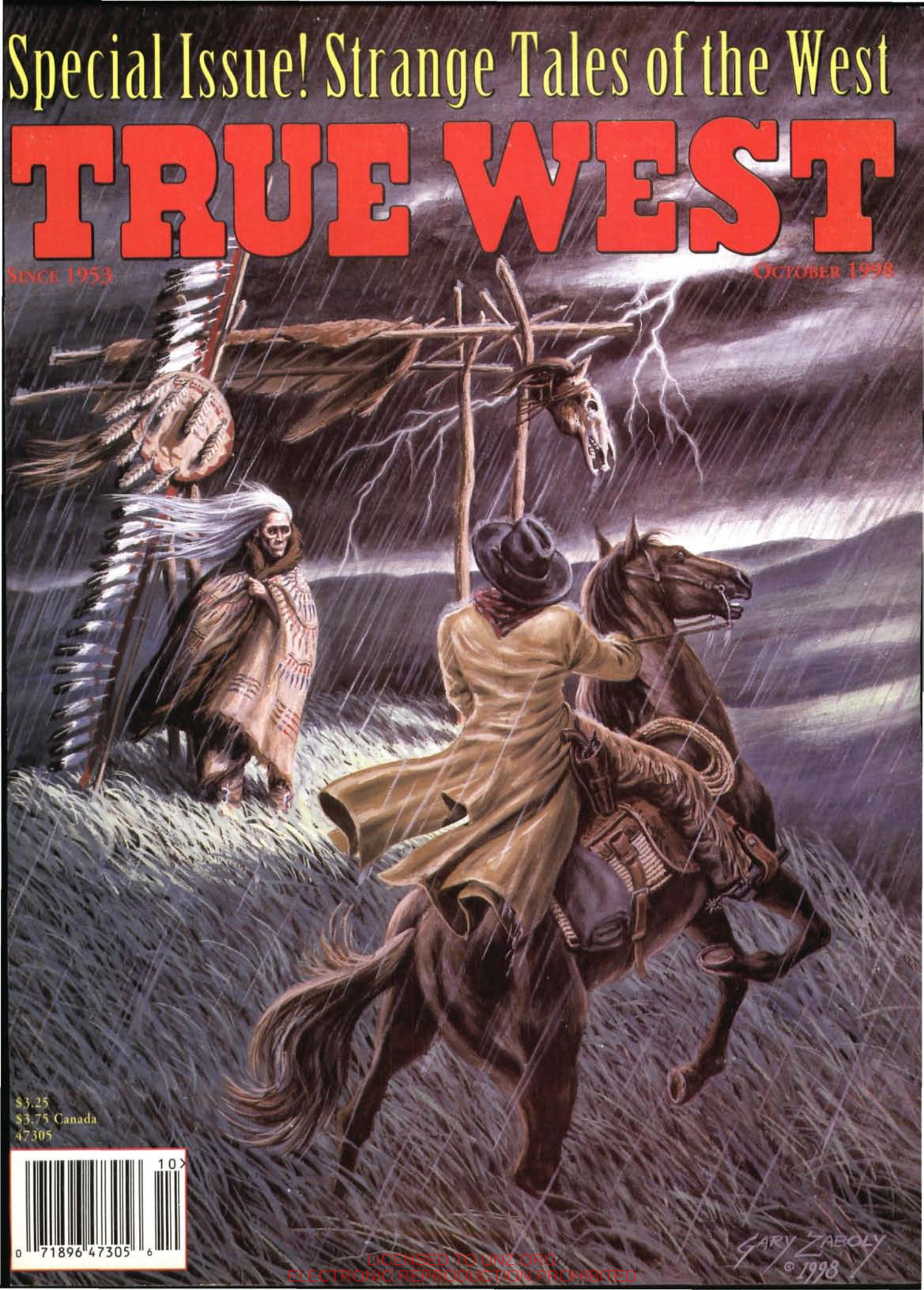

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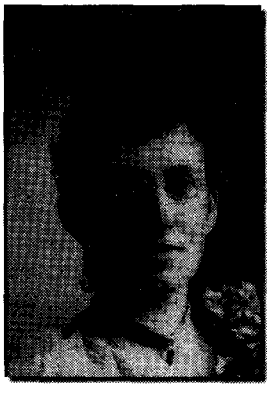

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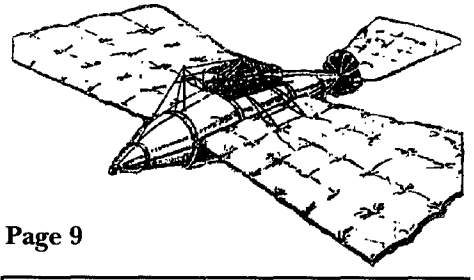
Our Cover

The Warrior Who Waits to Die
By Gary Zaboly

October 1998
Vol. 45, No. 10
Whole No. 366



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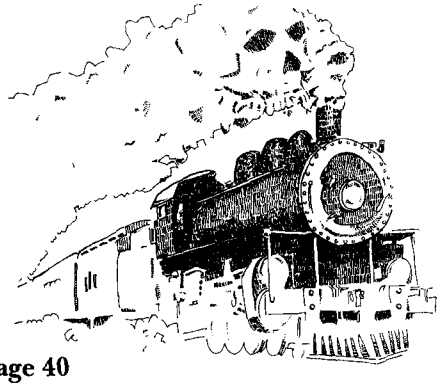

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FROM THE EDITOR

Howdy, ya'll!

Well, we're a'doin it again. Last year's "Strange Tales of the West" issue was such a hit with readers that we decided to throw together another for this, our October installment.

For just this month, we will lay aside the stories of leather-slapping gunmen and marauding Indians to concentrate, tongue in cheek, on ghost trains, Extra Sensory Perception, and all-around spooky goings-on. We've got so many stories packed into this issue that we abandoned the Crossword puzzle and a few regular features, all of which will return next month. You may also notice that we've substituted the "Truth Wagon," that finalizes each story, with a symbol more befitting the strange, spooky, and downright unbelievable.

Now, I don't have to tell you what a scary place the West is. Big, open spaces can be downright intimidating, and like the ocean and outer space, fear of the unknown and a healthy respect for what may be "out there" can cause the mind to play tricks.

A friend of mine told me one such tale about a lonely trip across the Southwest. He was driving along a desert highway late one evening, and it seemed he had the road all to himself, except for the occasional Russian thistle or jackrabbit crossing the blacktop. A pair of headlights appeared on the horizon, bobbing and weaving with the lay of the land. As the headlights drew closer, and my friend gained perspective, he recognized the approaching vehicle as a 1950s model Chevy, the kind that were built to last. It was the kind of car that people stop and stare at; a real beauty as evidenced by the light reflecting off the chrome grill and bumper. As the car got closer my friend could clearly make out the teardrop headlights and shiny red paint job.

Now, out here in the West it's common practice to wave at passing motorists, a kind of mindless thing we do, even in the dark. It's our way of saying "Howdy, friend. Hope you have a safe trip." As the Chevy came into clear view and my friend raised his hand in salute, he claimed to have almost run off the road in fright. He watched the taillights disappear in his rearview, his hand still poised to offer a greeting. He put both hands on the wheel and tried to laugh his thoughts away. "That car had no driver." Naw, couldn't be possible. The driver must have been rummaging through the glovebox or reaching for a thermos on the floorboard. Maybe he was adjusting the radio.

After a few minutes of bewildered thought, playing the scene over and over in his mind, my buddy pulled into a truck stop and got out to stretch his legs, mingle with a few real people, and come back to the world of the living. Hungry for conversation, my friend started small talk with the driver of a motorhome, standing at the gas pump filling his vacation home. "You would never believe what I just saw." The older gentleman relaxed his grip on the nozzle and looked cautiously at my pal. "Let me guess. You saw an old Chevy with nobody at the wheel. I saw the damn thing too, but I'll be damned if I would tell anybody about it."

I'm not sure if there's a lesson to be learned here, but it makes a great story. One thing is for sure, if you're ever driving the lonely, dark back roads of the West and you see an old Chevy a'coming your way, it may be best to just look straight ahead as she passes. You might not like what you see.

Marcus Huff

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Remembering Eve Ball

True West (July 1998) was a special delight. I enjoyed the articles on "Remembering *True West*" and "Eve Ball, Woman Among Men."

In 1953, when *True West* was first published, I turned thirteen. I recall a photo in one of the early issues of an Apache Mountain Spirit dance, taken at night. I was in awe of the early Indian photo, and the whole magazine. I began studying Indian culture: art, photos, languages, and dances. I sought out other Indians and whites who had any connection to our West. This has been one of the most fascinating quests of a lifetime.

Over the past forty-five years I've met or corresponded with Indian chiefs, old warriors, cavalry officers, sons and daughters and grandchildren of the families, artists or other writers, two Rough Riders, and a president or two.

In the early 1970s I began corresponding with Eve Ball. I read her articles, each time learning something new. We interviewed some of the same Apaches, who spoke well of her and called her "Sister." I knew then she could be trusted. I recall doing some research for her on the 1890 census records which burned in Washington. She needed to know if a certain Apache and his son were listed, in order to prove a legal claim. She asked me many questions about old Fort Marion in Florida. I had visited there several times and sent her some of my photographs of the fort. She was a fine lady, and I still have many of her letters.

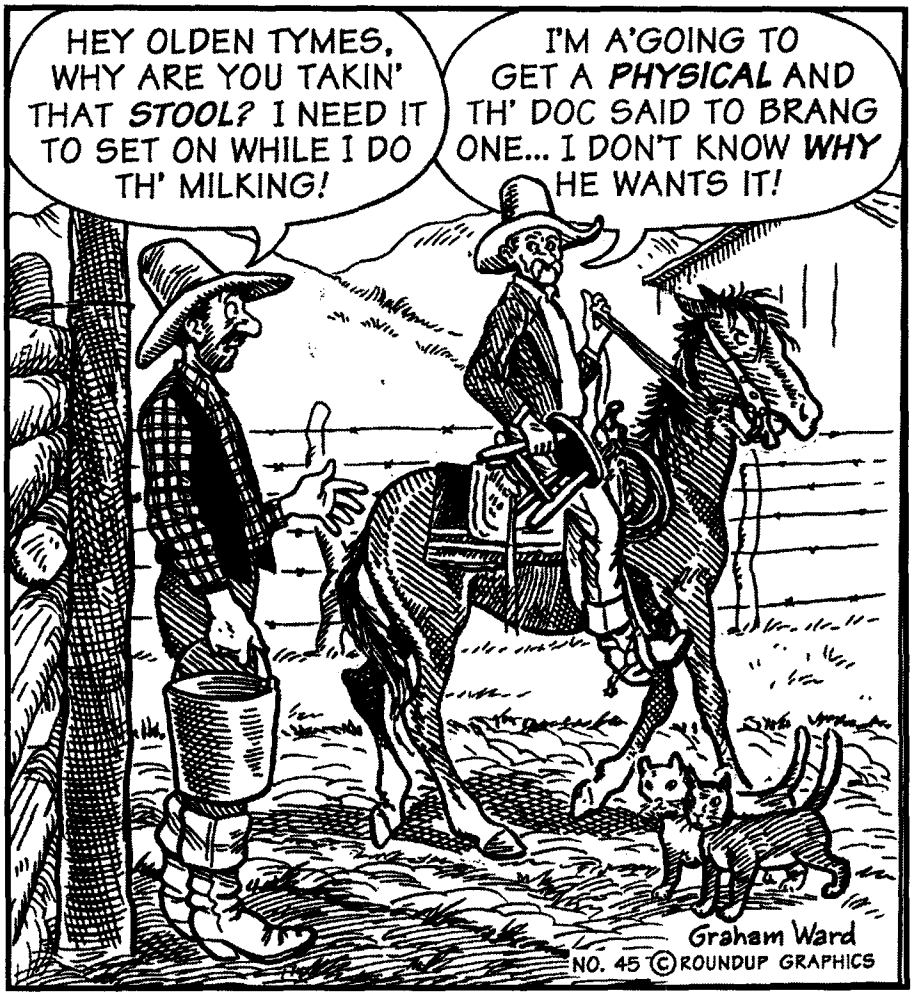
When I began this lifelong research I had no intentions of sharing, this was for my own edification. My wife, Adrienne, urged me to write for publications. I checked my old notes of an interview with one of Geronimo's warriors, Jason Betzinez (1860-1960) whom Eve Ball knew. In 1971 I sent the manuscript to a publisher on Monday, Tuesday they sent a check, Wednesday I received my first writing check! I've been writing ever since.

The old Indians I interviewed taught me many things: weather signs, tracking animals, and medicine. The old Kiowa and Comanche raiders knew the benefits of the prickly pear. If a warrior was grazed by an arrow or bullet they cut a section off the cactus, burned the spines off, and cut it open. The cactus was then tied to the wound with torn cloth. Modern uses of the prickly pear continues for cancer and diabetic victims.

I've met so many actors, both Indian and white, there is no room to list them. In fact, this "letter to the editor" has turned into a short story.

Thank you *True West*...for the memories.—*Ron Whitewolf Morgan, Redwater, Texas.*

SADDLE PALS **By Graham Ward**



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CHUMASH INTERPRETIVE CENTER

By Diane Kinzer Brown

Author's Photo

Replica of a tomol, or canoe, outside of the Chumash Interpretive Center.

On the site of an original Chumash settlement, the Chumash Interpretive Center at Oakbrook Regional Park seeks to preserve and expand our knowledge of the Chumash people who once lived in Thousand Oaks and other parts of Ventura County, California.

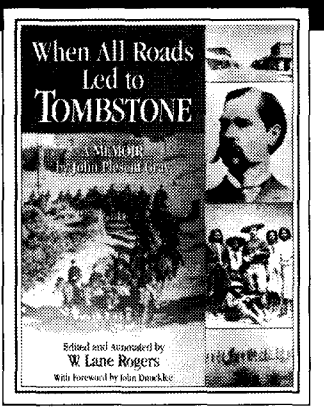
Outside the Center, there is an intricately carved replica of a tomol, or canoe, used for fishing and trading. Inside, there is a collection of Chumash items including tools, baskets, musical instruments, and games. Visitors are encouraged to stroll the grounds where they can enjoy a leisurely walk under a canopy of oak trees and pass by a natural spring which once supplied water to this inland settlement.

The Chumash from this area of Thousand Oaks were hunters and gatherers who traded their wares with local tribes living in what is now Malibu, Newbury Park, Port Heuneme, and the Channel Islands. Substantial evidence of this trading relationship exists—deer skins and seeds traded by inland settlers have been discovered at archaeological sites in coastal Ventura county, and shells and fish bones traded by coastal tribes have been unearthed

When All Roads Led to Tombstone

A Memoir by John Plesent Gray

Edited and Annotated by W. Lane Rogers



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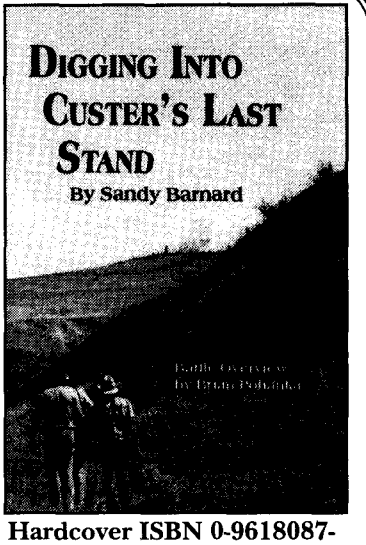

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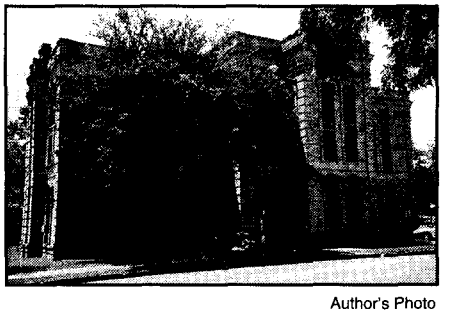
Expansion plans call for adding replicas of a Chumash hut and sweat-house. The men would use the sweat-house to cleanse themselves of dirt, rinse off and rub their bodies with a pungent native sage. The plant's odor was used to conceal their scent from the deer and rabbit they hunted, as well as from any grizzly bears which might be hunting them.

The Chumash Interpretive Center is open to the public from 10 AM to 5 PM, Tuesday through Saturday. Donations of $3.00 per adult and $2.00 for seniors and children are requested. Guided nature walks, wildlife shows, and school field trips are available. For further information, call 805-492-8076 or write to the Center at 3290 Lang Ranch Parkway, Thousand Oaks, California 91362.

THE OLD JAIL MUSEUM

By David F. Crosby



Author's Photo

The Gonzales County Jail, Gonzales, Texas.

In Gonzales, Texas, you can follow in the footsteps of four men who dropped through the gallow's trap door.

Built in 1887 to hold 150 to 200 prisoners, the Gonzales County Jail has seen its share of Old West history. Used as an actual jail until 1975, the brick structure finally released its last prisoner and was abandoned. But the jail had a story to tell—its walls really do talk through prisoner graffiti and jail art—and Gonzales turned the venerable building into an Old West museum.

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When you enter the front door you step into what was the entrance hall and sheriff's office. The museum has collected law enforcement artifacts from the ancestors of past sheriff's and put them on display in this area including an excellent collection of Old West firearms, manacles, jail house weapons, and period photographs. Also on the first floor is the jailer's living area, the cell where women, children, and lunatics were confined, ant the infamous dungeon where men who broke the rules spent time in solitary confinement.

A stairway leads to the second floor and a large cell known as the "runabout." Trustees and less dangerous criminals could move freely in this two story high, 30-feet by 30-feet cell. The gallows stood in this room so that hangings could be conducted inside the jail away from the carnival atmosphere that had taken hold in past hangings. Just such a spectacle had occurred in 1878 when 4,000 people came to town to witness the hanging of Brown Bowen.

The first gallows inside the jail were erected only for specific hangings, one in 1881 and one in 1891. After 1891, a permanent gallows was built in the "runabout" and used to hang two more men,one in 1891 and one in 1921. Ironically, the gallows face the three death cells on the third floor walkway where prisoners scheduled to "hang from their neck until dead" were forced to stare at the instrument of their execution day after day. The current gallows is a reproduction of the original.

You'll find the Old Jail Museum on the Courthouse Square in Gonzales, Texas. The museum is open weekdays from 8 AM to 5 PM, Saturday from 8:30 AM to 4 PM, and Sunday from 1 PM to 4 PM. Admission is free, but donations are accepted. For additional information call 830-672-6532 or write PO Box 134, Gonzales, Texas 78629.

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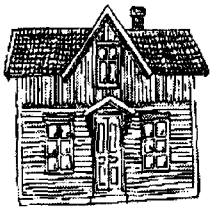

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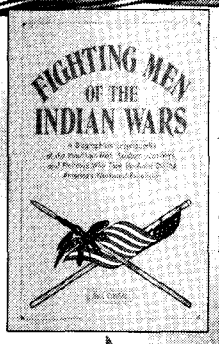

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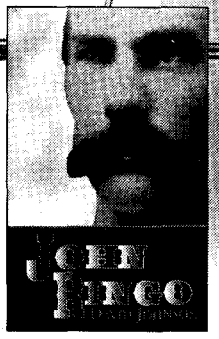

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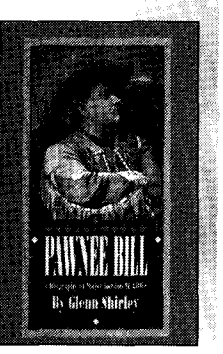

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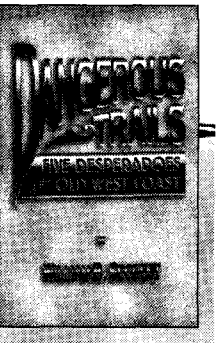

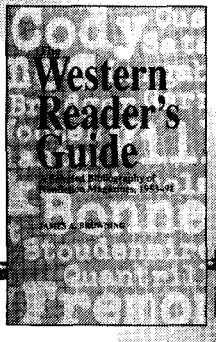

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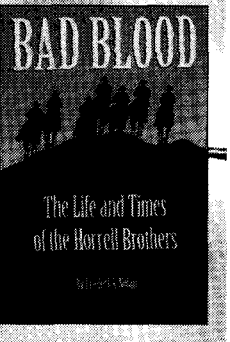

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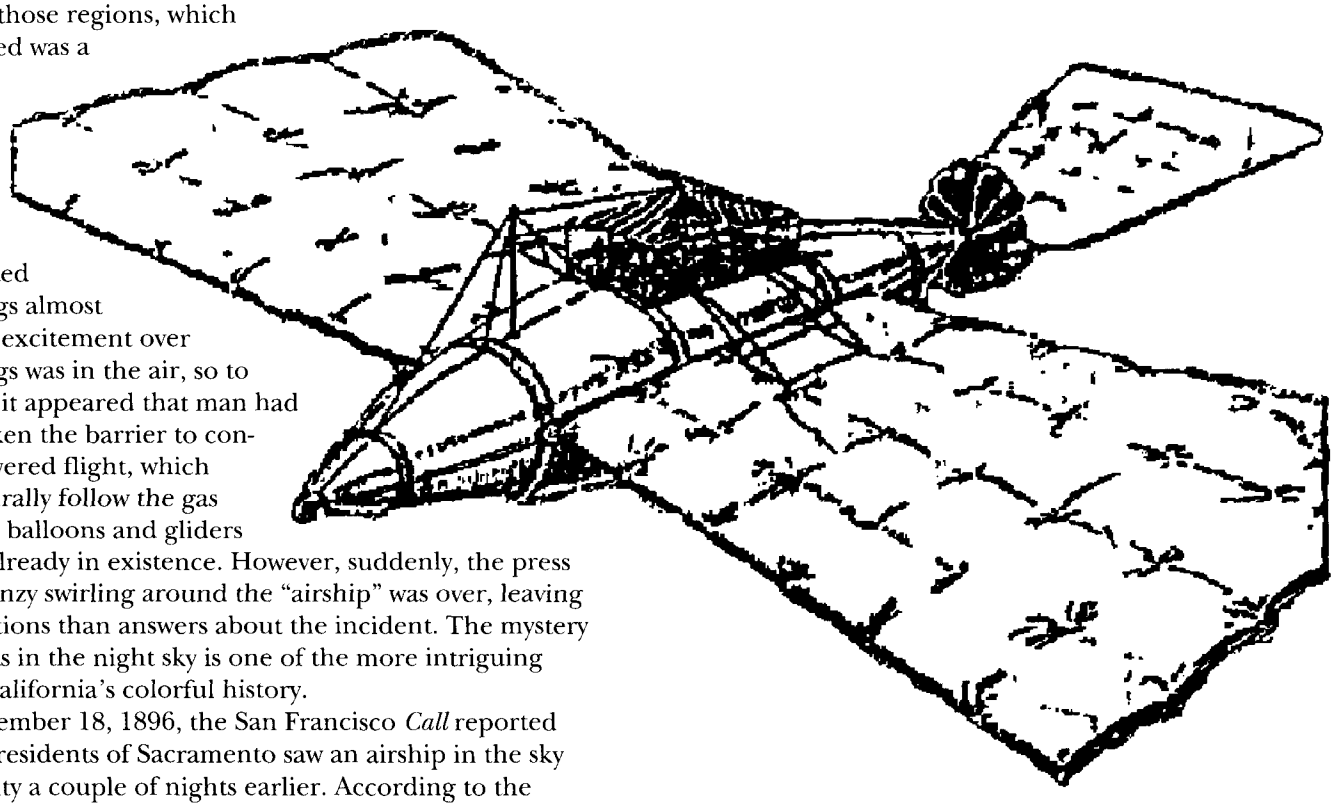
The Great California Airship Controversy

In late November and early December, 1896, a phenomenon occurred in the skies over California that was much like the later sightings of unidentified flying objects, of which most of us are familiar. Citizens of Sacramento and the San Francisco bay areas reported seeing moving lights at night over those regions, which they believed was a manned aircraft flying about. The local newspapers reported the sightings almost daily. Mass excitement over the sightings was in the air, so to speak, and it appeared that man had finally broken the barrier to controlled powered flight, which would naturally follow the gas and hot air balloons and gliders that were already in existence. However, suddenly, the press feeding frenzy swirling around the "airship" was over, leaving more questions than answers about the incident. The mystery of the lights in the night sky is one of the more intriguing events in California's colorful history.



On November 18, 1896, the San Francisco *Call* reported that many residents of Sacramento saw an airship in the sky over that city a couple of nights earlier. According to the *Call*'s report, the sightings created excitement among the viewers who said the airship appeared to be under perfect control and heading in the direction of San Francisco. However, the witnesses admitted they couldn't see the body of the airship distinctly because of the dark, low clouds and a

By Harold L. Edwards

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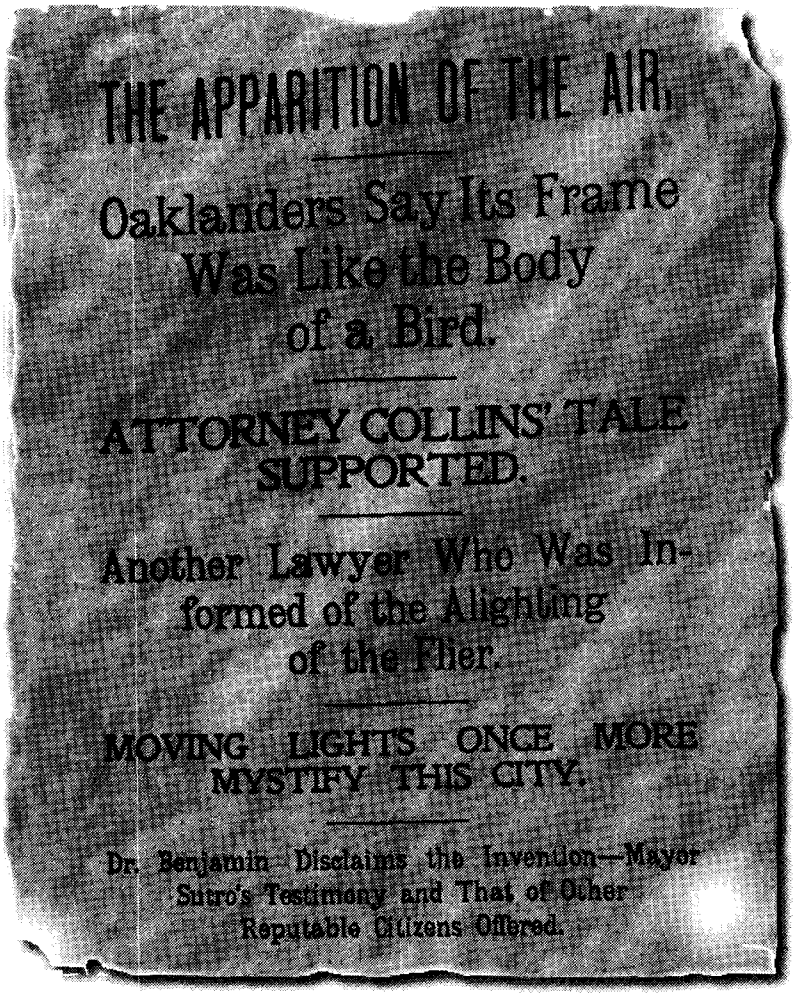
bright light from the craft blurred their visions. The object was tracked by its lights, which witnesses said were three times as bright as arc lights.

Viewers also reported they heard voices coming directly from the craft above them. Some of them stated the voices were members of the crew, arguing whether or not they should raise the ship to a higher altitude. The sound of the voices died away as the airship faded into the distance. The testimony also indicated that the power source for the airship was silent, adding to the mystery of what kind of vehicle it was.

The *Call* questioned the reports of the Sacramento sightings but stated that if they were true someone had solved the mystery of aerial navigation and was conducting an experiment at night to avoid mass curiosity. If that was the reason for a night flight, it failed because for the next month the Sacramento and San Francisco tabloids published stories about the aircraft sightings almost daily.

On November 19, the *Call* reported the sightings in Sacramento in more detail on its front page, complete with illustrations. The journal stated that hundreds of people in Sacramento saw the night lights and vouched for the truthfulness of the reports. However, also included in the *Call* report was the statement that even more people didn't see the moving lights and they were skeptical that an airship even existed. At this point, the pros and cons of the argument over whether or not the airship existed settled into place.

The *Call* went on to report that as far as could be determined the body of the aircraft was "oblonged and egg- shaped with fan-like wheels on either side, whose rapid revolutions beating the air, served to propel the vessel directly against the wind, and in so doing caused the vessel to sway from side to side with a wavering motion similiar to that of a boat being forced against a rapid current of a stream." Midway on its undercarriage, according to the report, there was a brilliant searchlight about the size of a large arc light. It was placed there so the crew members could ascertain when the ship was too close and in danger of colliding with tall objects. Again, it was said that the witnesses couldn't see the airship clearly.



THE APPARITION OF THE AIR.

Oaklanders Say Its Frame Was Like the Body of a Bird.

ATTORNEY COLLINS' TALE SUPPORTED.

Another Lawyer Who Was Informed of the Alighting of the Flier.

MOVING LIGHTS ONCE MORE MYSTIFY THIS CITY.

Dr. Benjamin Disclaims the Invention—Mayor Sutro's Testimony and That of Other Reputable Citizens Offered.

Author's Collection

The mystery airship made headline news in the San Francisco *Morning Call* of November 24, 1896.

A number of reputable citizens of Sacramento were interviewed by a *Call* reporter. Each person interviewed saw the lights, and all of them, mostly unknown to each other, gave similar accounts of their sightings. As so many people reported seeing the airship, there were some credence to their stories. However, the *Call* reported that there were many doubters.

The *Call* again reported airship news in its November 22 issue. This time the lights were reported to have been over Oakland on the east side of San Francisco bay, about seventy miles southwest of Sacramento. While this report pertained to the sightings of the night before, it was also a belated report, saying someone must be operating an airship in the area because it had been seen twice by residents of Oakland during the past six weeks. In each reported sighting, the description of the airship was the same, and in each case the airship seemed to be on course for San Francisco. Charles H. Ellis, a reputable Oakland citizen, and others, felt the floating lights were those of an airship although the vessel's form could not be distinguished in the dark.

This issue of the *Call* also reported that D.H. Risdon, of Tulare, a small farming community in the San Joaquin Valley some two hundred miles south of Sacramento, claimed to have seen an object sailing high in the sky while he was working in a field during

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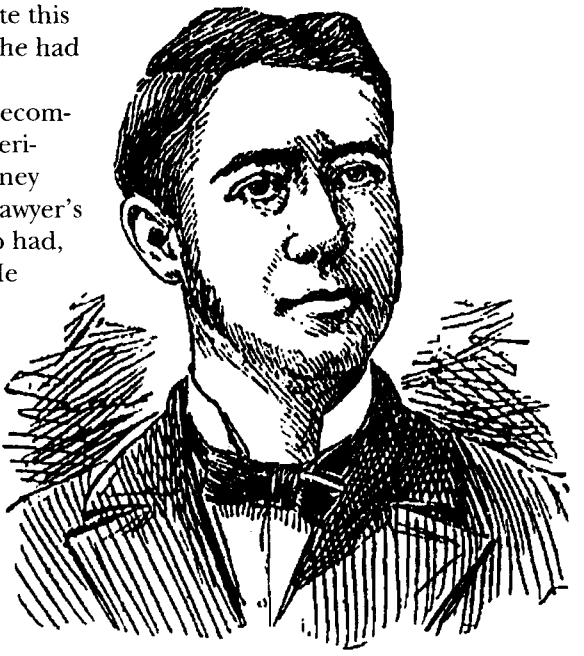
daylight hours. Risdon said the object had the appearance of an immense sheet spread out in the air. After this report, there were more aircraft sightings reported from throughout the state. However, most of the sightings centered around the San Francisco bay area.

The mysterious airship made headline news in the *Call* again the following day. While the other tabloids were conservative or even skeptical in their reports of aircraft sightings, the *Call* seemed certain there was truth in the stories. The newspaper claimed a scoop when a *Call* reporter claimed he interviewed San Francisco Attorney George D. Collins. Collins claimed to represent the inventor of the mystery aircraft. Collins wouldn't identify his client but said he was a wealthy man from Oroville, California. Collins went on to say that the man came to the attorney's home in Alameda, across the bay from San Francisco, and said he had important business at the patent office in Washington, DC, which he didn't trust to the mail or to anyone but a trusted servant. Attorney Collins inquired about the nature of the invention, but the inventor would say no more about it. The two men exchanged business cards but no more was accomplished at this meeting.

According to Collins and the *Call*, the unidentified inventor called on Collins a few days later at his San Francisco office. The men chatted amiably but the invention was not discussed. After several of these curious meetings, the inventor informed Collins that he, the inventor, did have an invention. He asked Collins for his services and confidence in the matter and said if his invention became public knowledge he would lose a fortune. When he mentioned his invention was an "airship," Collins asked him what kind of whiskey he had been drinking. The inventor became indignant and replied; "I have not been drinking, Sir, and when I do, it is not whiskey!" Collins then asked, "Have any members of your family ever been in the lunatic asylum?" Collins informed the *Call* reporter that the inventor didn't appreciate this question any more than he had the first one.

However, instead of becoming angry, the inventor seriously informed the attorney that he understood the lawyer's skepticism but an airship had, in fact, been invented. He continued by saying that he knew people would call him "crazy," but when his airship was demonstrated people would refer to him as a "genius." The inventor didn't claim to be a genius but said he was "practical." Collins took the case.



ATTORNEY GEORGE D. COLLINS, Who Knows the Inventor of the Great Airship.

Author's Collection

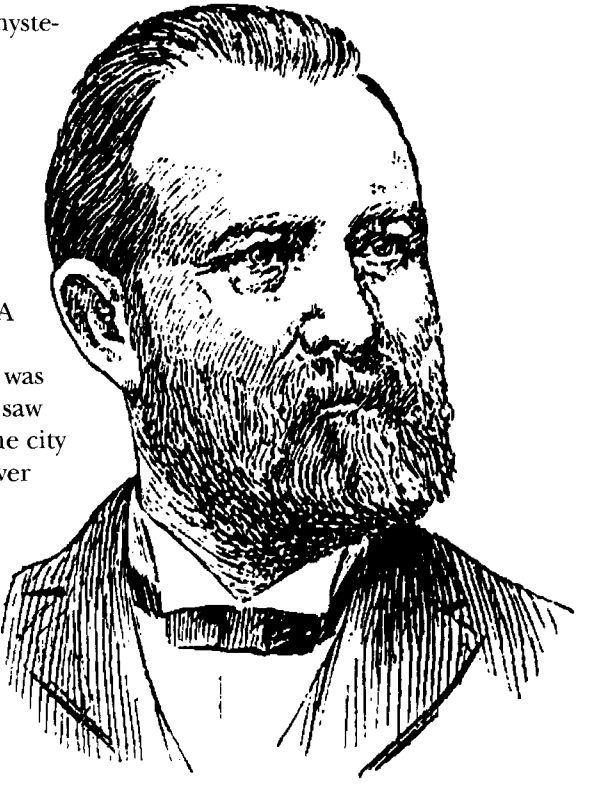
Attorney George Collins as illustrated in the San Francisco *Morning Call* of November 23, 1896.

Collins went on to say that the next time he and his client met the airship had been reported over several parts of the state. The inventor said that witnesses who reported seeing the airship told the truth, that the airship did fly over Sacramento and the San Francisco bay area and was now working perfectly. Attorney Collins stated to the *Call* reporter that he believed implicitly the truth of the inventor's story and the reported sightings of the mysterious aircraft.

Author's Collection

Attorney William Hart as illustrated in the San Francisco *Morning Call* of November 26, 1896.

The *Call* continued its report: "California's ex-attorney general, William H. Hart, a San Francisco attorney, publicly stated that he had no doubt that the airship and the sightings of it were bona fide." A Mr. Tyler, the assistant librarian in San Francisco, was with a party of people and saw the lights in the sky over the city after they were reported over Oakland that evening. San Jose, south of San Francisco, also reported several sightings that night. As a result of these sightings, the public seemed to favor the existence of some kind of airship, although many skeptics still remained.



EX-ATTORNEY-GENERAL W. H. H. HART.

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The *San Francisco Examiner,* November 24, 1896, joked about Attorney George Collins' statements that the airship existed.

The *San Francisco Chronicle, The Examiner,* and the San Francisco *Bulletin* duly reported the sightings but remained unconvinced that the airship actually existed, and *The Examiner* even ridiculed the idea.

The Examiner reported: "The historic bird of Sir Boyle Roche which contrived to be in two places at the same time would, not withstanding his varied accomplishments, have a parlous time to keep up with California's pet airship. The monster is everywhere by turns and is nowhere long. In Tulare he flaunts a scornful tail in the face of a cooked up moon; in Sacramento he goes kiting up and down the midnight heavens; in San Francisco he has wheels; in Oakland he clanks an uncanny clink; in Siskiyou he flames the forehead of the morning sky." "Siskiyou" is in the far northern part of California. Of course, these sarcastic jibes were aimed at descriptions of the sightings by *The Call* and other journals.

The San Francisco *Examiner* went on in this vein, saying that the "errant light might be anything from a Quixotic planet to a vagrant drugstore. Yet, these same people who give the descriptions are trustworthy citizens with reputations for veracity equaled only by the mariners who have seen the sea serpent." Of course, this paragraph openly questioned the integrity of those who reported seeing the airship. With this report, the *Examiner* made its position on the airship abundantly clear.

On November 23, the San Francisco *Bulletin* published a report that Attorney George Collins admitted that his story was false; however, he insisted that an inventor had visited him to discuss a patent for an airship. He didn't identify the inventor and added that he didn't think his client's proposed airship had anything to do with the reported sightings. With this statement, Collins bowed out of the scene.

Although Attorney Collins didn't identify the inventor, the press said he was Dr. E.H. Benjamin, a dentist from Oroville, California. On the day following Collins' interview, Dr. Benjamin made a statement to the press. He admitted he was an inventor, but for dental objects such as crowns and bridges, not airships. While the *Bulletin* pursued the story, the *Call* refused to believe Collins or Dr. Benjamin. The newspaper continued to report the sightings. At this point, ex-Attorney General William Hart stepped into the vacuum created by Collins' exit. Hart became the focus of press attention.

On November 24, the *Call* again published headline news about the airship. To support its view, the *Call* listed several prominent citizens who reported seeing the aircraft: San Francisco Mayor Charles Sutro; a Colonel Melton, the excursion agent for the Southern Pacific Railroad Company; Samuel Foliz, advertising agent for the *Call,* and Professor C.H. Murphy of the Polytechnic High School. Each of the men related how they had seen the airship. Their descriptions of the craft were essentially the same, and statements from these individuals seemed to lend some credibility to the *Call*'s reports.

At this point, the *Call* belatedly reported the airship's inventor to be Dr. E.H. Benjamin. Dr. Benjamin was interviewed by a reporter from the *Call* in San Francisco, and he said he didn't know anything about the mysterious aircraft. According to the *Call,* he went on to say that if he had invented the machine he would feel it wise not to say anything about it for patent reasons. According to the *Call,* Dr. Benjamin still maintained that his attorney was George Collins.

The *Call* ignored the *Bulletin*'s report that Collins was no longer part of the affair. However, Dr. Benjamin's denial that he invented

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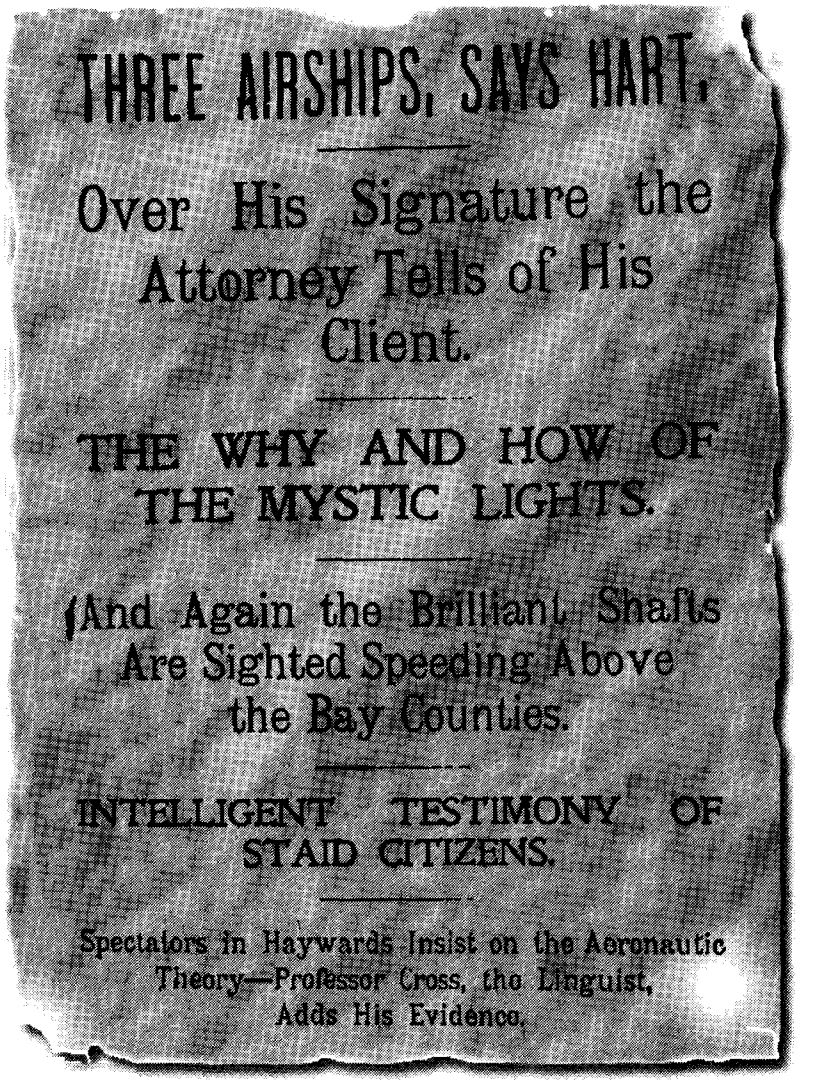
the airship put a damper, at least for the moment, on the *Call*'s enthusiasm for the invention, and its editor began to hedge: "At the hour of going to press the whole matter remains a mystery." The newspaper editor said he had no intentions of deceiving his readers. The *Call*, however, continued reporting sightings of the airship, saying it was seen the previous night over Hayward, a town just south of Oakland, and over Berkeley, a town just north of Oakland. It was also seen over San Francisco. All sightings described the moving lights as about the same in appearance.

The San Francisco *Examiner* of November 26 responded to the *Call*'s editorial by publishing sarcastic poems, cartoons, and narratives lampooning the airship and those who reported seeing it. A headline read: "THE SCARECROW FLY-BY-NIGHT: Scientific Men Prone To Scoff." In the following column the *Examiner* said the airship was a "filibuster bird," implying the *Call* had turned the reported sightings into press sensations and over-reported them. The *Examiner* went on to say: "There is not a respectable star in the heavens that is not in danger of being confounded with this vagrant fly-by-night, and a hot air balloon is enough to cause a riot on the streets."

In the face of criticism and opposition from the *Examiner*, the *Call* published headline news of the airship on November 28. The mystery lights were seen once more over San Jose, and, again, by reputable people. Professor H.B. Worrester, president of the Garden City Business College was hosting a party at his home when he and his guests saw the lights moving in the sky. Worrester felt the lights were man-made and connected to an object that moved through the air by flapping its wings. Worrester estimated its speed to be between sixty and 100 miles per hour. This was an interesting report, but several others reported seeing the lights from various parts of the city, and its speed apparently didn't impress any of them.



THREE AIRSHIPS, SAYS HART,

Over His Signature the Attorney Tells of His Client.

THE WHY AND HOW OF THE MYSTIC LIGHTS.

And Again the Brilliant Shafts Are Sighted Speeding Above the Bay Counties.

INTELLIGENT TESTIMONY OF STAID CITIZENS.

Spectators in Haywards Insist on the Aeronautic Theory—Professor Cross, the Linguist, Adds His Evidence.

Author's Collection

Airship sightings made headline news in the San Francisco *Morning Call* November 29, 1896.

The following day the *Call* once more reported about the airship in lengthy columns with headlines and illustrations. This report placed the airship over San Francisco. Although reports of sightings of the aircraft were now commonplace, the *Call* again emphasized that they were seen by reputable people. However, in spite of this, the *Call* published a weak disclaimer: "While even many of those who have seen the flitting and gleaming lights are not prepared to declare they are carried by a full-fledged aerial craft they admit they can account in no ordinary way for the phenomenon. There is, therefore, yet ample room for the mystery to be proved a fake, a hallucination or a verity. Meanwhile, until the mystery is completely solved, the *Call* will continue to chronicle the news relating to it, taking nothing from nor adding anything to the reports it receives." The newspaper continued to report more sightings of the airship around the San Francisco bay area.

On November 30, 1896, the *Call* published a brief history of reports in the press about the mystery lights and the connecting "airship." News reports from the very first were described and the *Call* admitted that the sightings, which were at night, failed to produce a clear vision of the aircraft. The statements of the alleged inventor, Dr. Benjamin, and his alleged attorney, George Collins, were reviewed. However, the article didn't mention the *Bulletin*'s report of November 23, stating that

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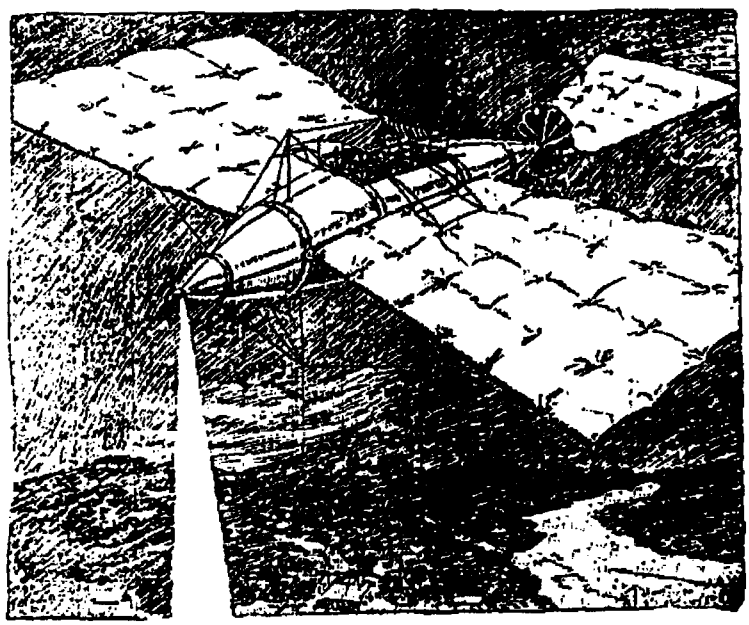
Attorney Collins said his story about the aircraft and its inventor were fakes. The *Call*'s article merely stated that ex-Attorney General Hart was substituted for Collins as the "legal custodian of the secrets and destiny of the airship."

At this point, politics reared its ugly head, and the *Call* review produced some startling news. Attorney Hart said that the airship mystery was only incidental to a full-fledged and extraordinary scheme for the capture or the destruction of the city of Havana, the stronghold of the Spanish authorities in Cuba, by an attack from the air using dynamite bombs. This was a precursor to aerial bombardment, far ahead of its time. In addition to carrying a crew and its operating equipment, Hart claimed the airship could support one-half ton of explosives. Obviously, Attorney Hart was a proponent of freeing the Cuban people from Spanish colonialism by force if necessary, and he believed it necessary. For his published intemperate remark, Hart and the *Call* were attacked by the *Examiner* and the *Bulletin*.

About this time, Dr. Benjamin disappeared from his San Francisco lodgings and thereafter he was not a part of the ongoing stories about the airship. However, Attorney Hart was still the focus of press attention, and he defended his earlier statement about attacking Havana by air. He claimed if cities could be destroyed by air that would firmly establish peace in the world. Obviously, subsequent world events proved his thesis erroneous.

The Visalia *Weekly Delta* published another interesting political view of the night lights: "C.P. Fox declares that the mysterious illuminations is a proof of the great fact the near advent of co-operating Socialism. The light is gathering cohesion of the meteors which Flammarion, the great French astronomer, predicted would shower upon us a short time ago, into a planet all their own, whereupon man is to help his neighbor and every neighbor help his man."

At this point, Attorney Hart stated there was not one airship, but two: one large and one smaller. Since newspaper reports indicated that the lights were seen in all parts of the state, Hart claimed that one airship was flying around the San Francisco bay area and the other one was in southern California. He also reaffirmed his view through the *Call* that the airship could help free the Cubans from the grip of Spanish tyranny. Astonishingly, he got at least one volunteer who would accompany him on the mission.



Author's Collection

The mystery airship as illustrated in the San Francisco *Morning Call*.

On December 2, 1896, the Bakersfield *Californian* published an incredible story as proof, or spoof, of the aircraft's existence. According to the story, John A. Horan, an electrician, went to San Francisco where he saw the aircraft and its inventor. He was given a demonstration of the vehicle. Accompanied by the ship's crew, he rode the craft from San Francisco to Hawaii. They left on a Thursday night and arrived in Honolulu the following morning before daylight. They quickly turned back and arrived at their starting point by Saturday evening. According to Horan, the airship was swiftly propelled by two propellers which made no noise as their power source was not steam or electricity. The story had no influence on the credibility of an airship either way.

Suddenly, floating or speeding lights in the night or airships ceased to be newsworthy, and by mid-December there were no further mentions of them in the newspapers. The press feeding frenzy was over, and it seemed as if the incident had never happened. The lights seemed not to be natural phenomenon, and they apparently were not hot air balloons floating around the sky. Of course, they weren't lights on a manned aircraft as one wouldn't be flown for another seven years. There was little doubt the press used the subject to inflate circulation of newspapers, and the public seemed to want to believe man had progressed into manned flight by power. The press attention to the story got out of hand and was pressed to absurdity, which couldn't sustain itself.

How could so many well-known, honest, reliable, and steadfast people from all over California claim to have seen the lights in the sky if there was nothing there? That question has never been answered. There have been many press controversies in California over the years, but the one over whether or not there was some kind of airship flying in the night skies over California in 1896 will remain unique in California's history.

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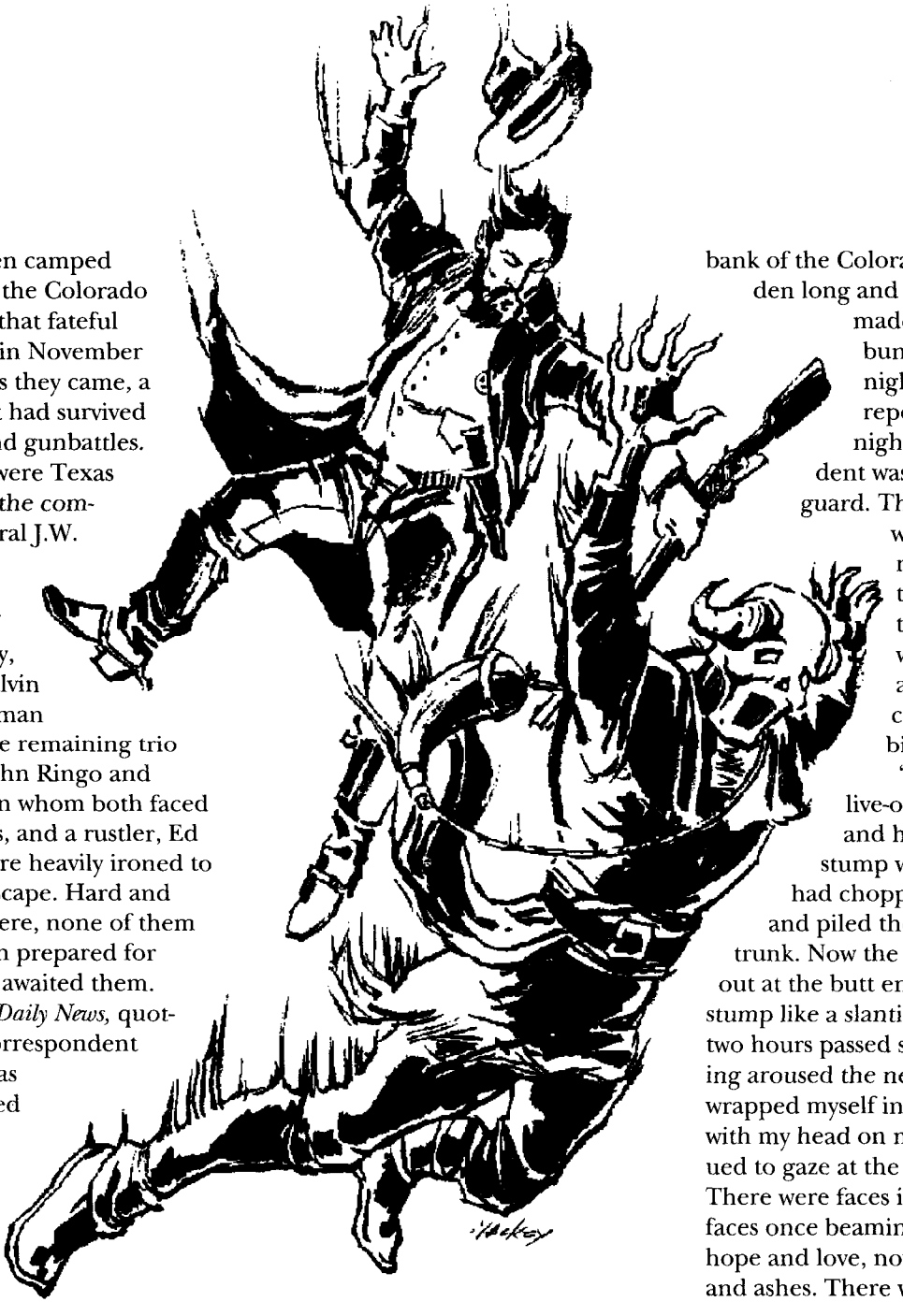
Terror on the Colorado

BY DAVE JOHNSON
ILLUSTRATED BY KIM MACKEY



The men camped along the Colorado River that fateful night in November were as tough as they came, a dozen men that had survived Indian fights and gunbattles. Seven of them were Texas Rangers under the command of Corporal J.W. Warren. With them was J.J. Bozarth, sheriff of Llano County, and Colonel Calvin Wright, a liveryman from Llano. The remaining trio were feudists John Ringo and George Gladden whom both faced murder charges, and a rustler, Ed Mitchell. All were heavily ironed to prevent their escape. Hard and tough as they were, none of them could have been prepared for the horror that awaited them. The Galveston *Daily News,* quoting a Ranger correspondent identified only as Mervyn, reported the story on December 7, 1877.

The group had camped on the west bank of the Colorado having "ridden long and hard." The men made supper, then bunked down for the night. Ranger Mervyn reported: "At midnight your correspondent was aroused to go on guard. The waning moon was dancing on the rippling sheen of the Colorado as I took my post to watch the sleepers and the glowing coals beneath the big log.

"A huge hollow live-oak broken down, and hanging to its stump was our fuel. We had chopped up the boughs and piled them against the trunk. Now the smoke poured out at the butt end, resting on the stump like a slanting chimney. My two hours passed swiftly by: and having aroused the next man, I wrapped myself in my blankets, and, with my head on my saddle, continued to gaze at the glowing coals. There were faces in those embers—faces once beaming brightly with hope and love, now turned to dust and ashes. There was one face, a

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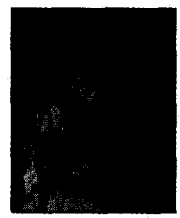

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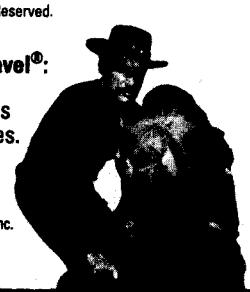

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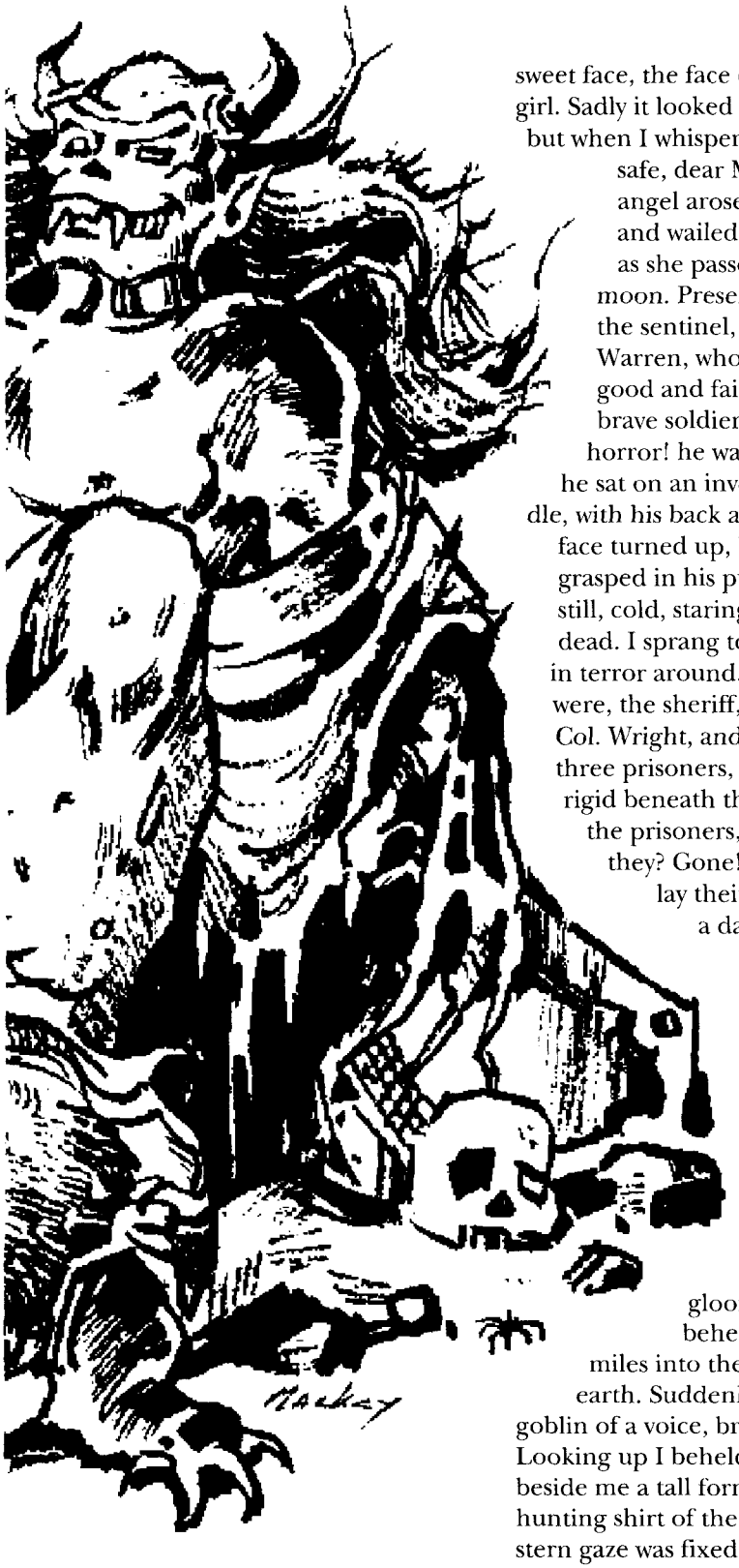

sweet face, the face of a blue eyed girl. Sadly it looked out upon me, but when I whispered, 'The baby is safe, dear Mary,' a radiant angel arose above the blaze and wailed upward, smiling as she passed beyond the moon. Presently I glanced at the sentinel, Corporal Warren, who relieved me. A good and faithful Ranger, a brave soldier is Warren. Oh, horror! he was dead. There he sat on an inverted pack-saddle, with his back against a tree, his face turned up, his carbine grasped in his pulseless hand, still, cold, staring, stark, and dead. I sprang to my feet, gazing in terror around. There they were, the sheriff, the Rangers, Col. Wright, and all but the three prisoners, lying ghastly and rigid beneath the moon. And the prisoners, where were they? Gone! all gone. There lay their shackles beside a dark pit."

The remaining Ranger buckled on his cartridge belts, knife, and pistol, then seized his Winchester before approaching the brink of the pit. "Gazing into its gloomy depths, I beheld apparently miles into the bowels of the earth. Suddenly a voice, or the goblin of a voice, broke the stillness. Looking up I beheld standing beside me a tall form dressed in a hunting shirt of the olden time. His stern gaze was fixed upon me, and the words burned into my heart and memory as he spoke in a tone of voice resembling the winter wind moaning through the forest."

The newcomer offered to guide the Ranger, who reported "The voice died away and I found myself sinking like a lead plummet through the pit, which became lurid as I sank. Beneath my feet I saw my phantom guide flying downward into the ever widening shaft. Stratum after stratum we passed, argilaceous quartz; in thick veins, coal, iron, silver, and petrified monsters with tons of ivory in a single tooth, till suddenly we shot out into a great hollow filled with star-like lights. Onward we sped till, arriving at the 'center of gravity' I recognized his ventable majesty of infernal reputation seated upon the throne.

"'Who now, Molock?' This to my guide.

"'A Texas Ranger?'

"'Where art thou' Ranger, cans't tell?' This to me.

"'At the earth's center?' I replied.

"'Well said, Ranger; am I not greatest of all, and do not all things contribute to my majesty?'

"'Indeed, you possess great attraction in some mysterious way' I replied, musing on Newton and the apple and the Booklyn preacher.

"'Fall down and worship me!' thundered the now frowning devil.

"'I ain't addicted to prayer,' I replied, pumping a cartridge into my Winchester and aiming full at his horned head.

"'Darest thou attempt to get the drop on me, thou worm of a State whose capital is beet-root, whose heroes' monuments would shame the grave of a savage, with its hideous death-head sculpture, thou whose people fear the 'Greasers' too much to avenge rapine on their border? Wretch, am I not greater than Congress, less a fraud than thy government, and as pure as thy priest? Molock, hurl him in with the rest!'

"In an instant I was pitched into a burning cauldron. The heat exploded the cartridges in the magazine of my Winchester, and.... A chunk of fire had rolled against my back and burned off the tail of my overcoat, 'as deep as to the flesh.' Only one cartridge exploded. That one was in my pants pocket behind. Hence the dream."

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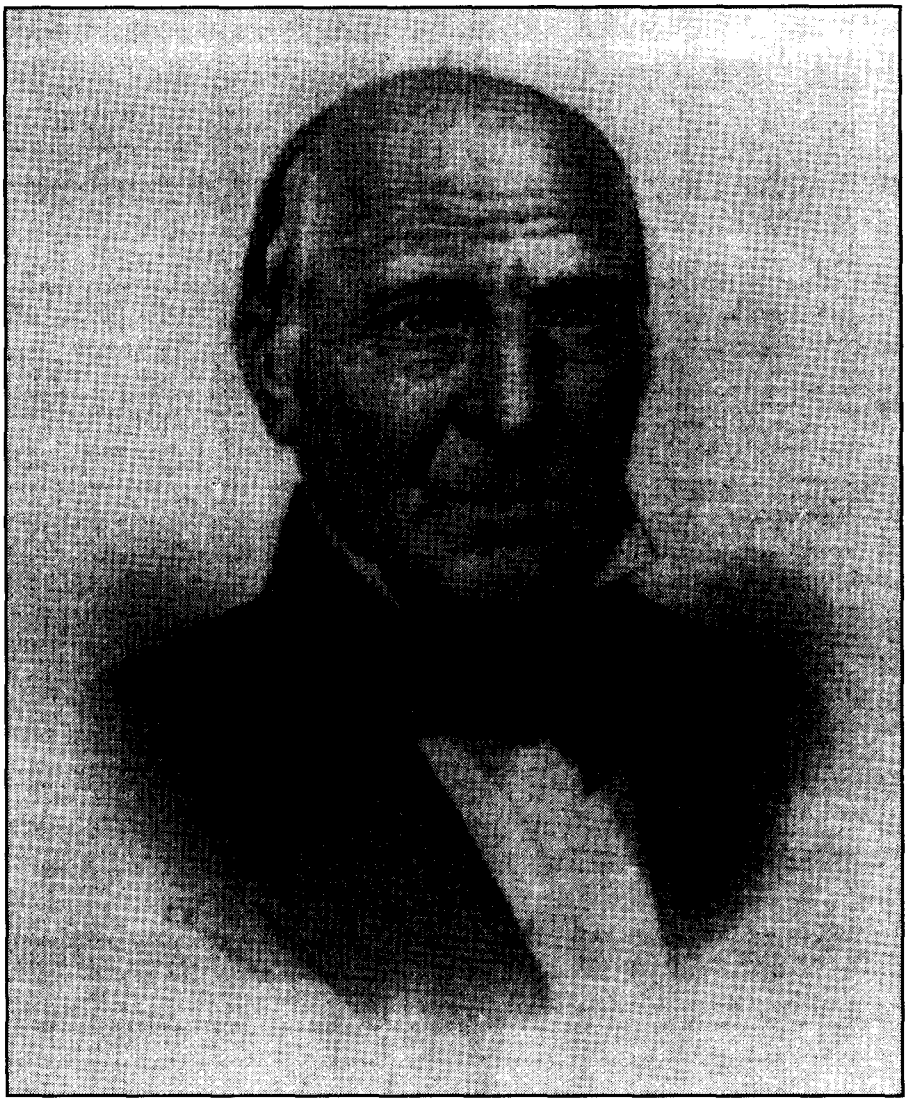
Technically led by two aging, if not incompetent, Illini brothers, George and Jacob Donner, the company of eighty-seven men, women, and children had a natural (if rash) leader in James Frazier Reed. But in August 1846, near Fort Bridger, in present-day southwestern Wyoming, all three were persuaded by Lansford Hastings to take his untried shortcut to California, bearing south of Great Salt Lake.

The Hasting Cutoff crossed precipitous ranges of the Wasatch Mountains before meeting Utah's hellish Salt Desert. During the worst part of the march, the emigrants made just thirty-six miles in twenty-one days. Men were exhausted; oxen dead or dying; wagons abandoned. To make matters worse, Reed later killed a teamster in a quarrel on Nevada's Humboldt River. Narrowly escaping a lynching for murder, the one man who might have saved the party was banished. (Amazingly, he eventually returned from his exile in California to help rescue the very men who had virtually condemned him to death in the desert.)

By now, the Donner Party was thrown so far off-schedule that it did



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George C. Yount, Napa Valley patriarch and psychic visionary.

By Richard H. Dillon
Illustrated by Gary Zaboly

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not arrive at the base of the Sierra till the very end of October, ironically, just *one* day after the passes were closed by an unseasonably early snowfall.

Trapped at Truckee Lake, now Donner Lake, for weeks by continuing storms, the snowbound emigrants began to die of exposure and starvation. They finally had to resort to cannibalism before the first relief parties arrived in February and March of 1847. There were only forty-eight survivors.

Yes, everyone knows the Donner Party. But few history buffs, even *aficionados* in California itself, realize that its fate triggered the first recorded case of psychic phenomena in the West.

ESP is shorthand for extra-sen-

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sory perception, a relatively new catch-all term lumping together four types of paranormal encounters common to humans over hundreds of years. Not till 1934 did J.B. Rhine coin the term, using it as the title of a book in 1935. It was soon shortened to its initials, ESP.

Extra-sensory perception is composed of four kinds of inexplicable mental, or psychic, phenomena. All of them involve the perception of things by means outside of our recognized senses. The phenomena are apparitions, clairvoyance, precognition, and telepathy. The popular American writer, Alex Woolcott, quickly picked up Rhine's terminology, and Britons Aldus and J.S. Huxley soon vouched for its "scientific" respectability. They added that distance seemed to have no effect on it.

If ESP is a new concept and term, its parts are quite old. According to entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which librarians view as being practically gospel, the most limited of ESP's components, apparitions, dates all the way back to the time of Saint Thomas More (1478-1535). It refers to a very special kind of spiritual manifestation, and one unknown to George Yount, the sudden appearance of invisible beings, that is, spirits or ghosts.

But if Dutch George, as the ex-mountain man was called, saw no spooks in Napa Valley, he was certainly introduced to clairvoyance, telepathy, and precognition by the Donner Party. Clairvoyance dates only to Yount's own time, the 1840s, in the writings of Briton Thomas Carlyle and American Ralph Waldo Emerson. It means the facility of a person like Yount to mentally perceive objects or individuals at a great distance, even when hidden from sight.

As impressive as Yount's clairvoyance was his precognition. This mysterious skill was much more than anticipation, or even prediction, of future events. It is completely inexplicable foreknowledge of events, "seeing" them before they actually happen. The word is almost as old as clairvoyance, dating to 1611, again according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Yount's clairvoyance and precognition were part of a more general phenomenon, telepathy or mental telepathy. It was clumsily called telesthaesia when first used by London's Society for Psychical Research in 1882. Telepathy need not forecast the future; it just means the communication of impressions, of any kind, from one person's mind to another, but independent of ordinary, recognized channels of the senses.

Historian Hubert H. Bancroft, convinced that telepathy was a pseudo-science, did not believe Yount's psychic warning. Bancroft's explanation of the pioneer's portent was that the first few survivors of the Donner debacle had already reached Sutter's Fort from the so-called Cannibal Camps before Yount had his dream, and one survivor of them had even reached Napa Valley. (Reed, the exile, was already in the Valley, too; but he had left the party before it got into desperate trouble.)

Dr. Charles Camp, Yount's second biographer, was a doubter like Bancroft, even though Patty Reed told him that, when her father first arrived in Napa Valley, Yount said to him he was preparing supplies for the Donners because of his dream. Camp admitted that Yount's dream was "reasonable" enough. But he was scientifically trained, a professional paleontologist; history was just his avocation. He could not bring himself to believe such hocus-pocus.

Yount told several visitors besides Reed of his gripping experience with parapsychology. One of them was Lieutenant Joseph Warren Revere, Paul Revere's grandson. The United States Navy officer first recounted the pioneer's strange vision for a national audience in his 1849 book, *A Tour of Duty in California*.

A better-known writer, Richard Henry Dana, later called on Yount. He was back in California years after writing his classic *Two Years Before the Mast*, and he described Yount's mysterious prophecy in 1859.

Dana was skeptical when Yount told him, flat out, that he had described the Donner Lake campsite so precisely that "rescuers were sent and found the Donner Party in exactly the condition I had

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described." Yet the author did not believe that Yount exaggerated in regard to his "divinely-sent" experience. The Bostonian wrote: "Yount is a man of unimpeachable integrity, and moderate and reasonable in his views."

Dana also recalled that his host gave him and other listeners a reason for the Donner Party's plight. "Gentlemen, I sort of believe in punishment." He then explained that the overland company had left a sick man to his fate. "This may have been their punishment...." The vision was, obviously a near-religious experience for the pioneer. "I am inclined to believe in spiritual manifestations. You cannot limit the power of the spirit."

Revere and Dana picked up bits and pieces of Yount's life, but the latter dictated his whole autobiography only to the Reverend Orange Clark. Yount's amanuensis was absolutely necessary, for Dutch George was almost entirely illiterate. Clark re-wrote his friend's *Narrative* in 1855, but could not find a publisher. As for Yount's veracity in the Donner matter, and others, the Reverend Clark said: "Nothing in this world could induce him to violate truth or deviate an inch from the strictest integrity."

After reaching Nevada's Humboldt Sink on October 12, the Donner Party hurried two men ahead to Captain John Sutter for help. Thus, word of the emigrants' coming did reach Sutter's Fort, and even Napa Valley, before Yount's dream. But the travelers were only tired and short of supplies at this stage, and Captain Sutter quickly sent five pack mules of food with two of his Indians. These *arrieros* (muleteers) would also help the overlanders as guides.

As yet, matters were not really critical for the Donners, although they were still a long way from the Sierra Nevada. There was no real concern felt for them—prior to Yount's dream—by Sutter and General M.G. Vallejo. The mountain passes were, normally, not closed by snow until late November, giving the Donners plenty of time to reach New Helvetia, or Sutter's Fort.

Orange Clark picked up the story at this point, using Yount's own words. On being informed of the Donner Party's (modest) suffering,

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from hunger and fatigue, on the Humbolt River, Yount found it difficult to sleep quietly before measures were taken for the company's relief. At the first news, there had been much discussion among the *rancheros* as to the best and most feasible method of helping the emigrants. But only Yount was nervous, worried.

"After much reflection, he retired to rest. All the accounts hitherto received were vague and indefinite. It was impossible to determine where the sufferers might be found and what route would be most likely to lead to them." Oppressed and exhausted by so much anxiety, Yount fell asleep. But dreams and visions greatly troubled his rest. In these dreams Yount clearly saw himself present among the entrapped emigrants.

Yount told Clark that he witnessed a degree of distress beyond imagination. "He dreamed that he saw the overlanders eating bodies; that the snow was more than twenty feet deep; that snowshoes would be required to reach them; that provisions must be carried on the backs of men on snowshoes." (All of these prophecies proved to be true.)

Next morning, Yount got up and, without even eating breakfast, sent messengers eighteen miles west to General Vallejo at Sonoma and a dozen miles in another direction to James Reed, resting from his harrowing desert experience. George asked Sutter for bread, since he had an inadequate supply at *Rancho Caymus*. But he set his own men to butchering and dressing beeves and jerking meat. Yount supplied Reed with horses and food for a second relief attempt, following Sutter's successful one. Clark described Reed as "a noble-spirited man whose wife, it was supposed, might be among the sufferers." But when Reed made the attempt, he failed in his objective. He found the Sierra snowdrifts far too deep for his saddle horses and pack animals, and had to give up the effort. His later attempt would be a success.

Many, if not most, Californians of Yount's day, and later, came to accept his dream-vision as fact. They were convinced that his foreseeing the Donner's entrapment in the High Sierra was influential in their eventual rescue.

If Bancroft and Camp, and perhaps Dana, doubted Yount's temporary supernatural powers, the Reverend Horace Bushnell was as convinced of their validity as was the Reverend Orange Clark. In his 1858 book, *Nature and the Supernatural*, Bushnell described Yount's psychic vision to a truly national audience. The preacher had to admit that Yount's case was "not so closely religious in nature" as some others in his volume. But, he added, it was "explicable in no way by the mere causalities of nature."

One stormy November night, Bushnell sat by a warm fire in a Napa hotel with other guests, including George Yount. There he heard "Captain Yount's" story, and wrote it down. But, first, he described the Valley's pioneer. Yount was "a tall, manly and gracious individual with an unsophisticated, but paternal, look; a most venerable and benignant-looking person...a kind of acknowledged patriarch in the country."

Bushnell then wrote of the patriarch's precognition and clairvoyance. "In a mid-winter's night, he had a dream in which he saw what appeared to be a company of emigrants, arrested by the snows of the mountains, and perishing rapidly by cold and hunger. He noted the very cast of the scenery, marked by a huge, perpendicular front of white rock cliff. He saw the men cutting off what appeared to be tree tops, rising out of deep gulfs of snow. He distinguished the very features of the persons, and the look of their particular distress."

Yount told the circle of listeners that he had awakened in the middle of the night profoundly impressed by the distinctness, the reality, of his strange dream. He had fallen asleep again: but only to dream once more, and it was exactly the same dream. In the morning, he could not drive it from his mind. When he met an old hunter friend and told him of it, the fellow said that a place in the Sierra Nevada's Carson Valley Pass answered Yount's description. This opinion decided Yount, and he immediately collected men, horses, and provisions for Reed's first attempt to rescue the Donners.

A few of Yount's neighbors were initially skeptical of his vision, and laughed at his credulity. "No matter," he told them. "I am able to do this and I will. For I verily believe that the fact is according to my dream."

A gentleman in the hotel gathering reassured Bushnell on Yount's predictive dream. "You have no doubt of this, for we Californians all know the facts, and the names of the families brought in; who now look upon our venerable friend as some kind of savior." In his book, Bushnell later wrote, "I found, afterward, that the California people were ready, everywhere, to second his testimony."

Bushnell ascribed Yount's supernatural experience to a religious Providence of which the unsophisticated old mountain man was unaware. Perhaps this was so, considering Yount's own mention of his belief in spirits. Dr. Camp surely overstated his piety, however. Dutch George Yount was not a devout mountain man like Jedediah Smith. Only a nominal backwoods Protestant, he became a Roman Catholic without hesitation in order to acquire Mexican citizenship in California and, thus, secure his huge land grant ranch in Napa Valley, *Rancho Caymus*. After California fell to the U.S., Yount married a minister's widow and, probably because of her piousness, not his own, easily switched back to Protestantism, even becoming a Bible-Bearer for Yountville's Masons.

The Napa Valley patriarch, himself, would only say of his prophetic vision (religious or otherwise), that the "brightest thing in my life, and that which gave me the greatest joy, was my simple faith in that dream."

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OSAGE

By J.D. Haines

Everyone is familiar with the legends of hermits and similar mysterious, primal men that haunt our imagination. But many are probably unaware that the Osage country of Oklahoma was once home to a bonafide "wild man." The story first appeared in the August 1, 1903, issue of the *Osage Journal.* Fact or fiction? You be the judge.

Illustrated by Al Martin Napoletano

SURE ENOUGH WILD MAN
MYSTERIOUS INDIVIDUAL
ROAMING THE RESERVATION
AND FEEDING ON MULE MEAT
QUEER STORY FROM BANKS OF HOMINY

"Tom Nichols, who lives near Chautauqua Springs and a neighbor...were in Bartlesville Tuesday for some threshing machine repairs, and they related the story of a genuine wild man who had his lair in the Osage Reservation between Bird and Hominy Creeks. The strange creature is described as a man about fifty years of age, with long matted hair and an iron-gray beard reaching almost to his waist. The only garment he wore was an old gunny sack secured to his waist by a strand of barbed wire. His body had been tanned to a chestnut brown by the sun and covered with a coat of light hair. The man, evidently bereft of reason, is wild as a deer and his only utterance is a savage growl, like that of a wild animal. He was surprised in the act of gathering some roasting ears last Saturday by a couple of farmers who came upon him

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WILD MAN

while hunting some dogs in a cornfield. The wild man, so Nichols states, at the approach of the farmers stood perfectly still until they came close and addressed him. Then with a blood-curdling growl he menaced them, backing off a few rods to the fence, a ten rail affair, which he leaped with the agility of a cat and then disappeared in the brush. The wild man was armed with the blade of a briar scythe, which he had fashioned into a rude but formidable weapon. Brandishing this above his head, the creature held the men at bay while he escaped into the timber.

"A hastily organized party started in pursuit of the wild man an hour or two after his departure from the cornfield, but he successfully evaded his would be captors. However, they discovered his lair in a thicket in the center of a big pasture. Brush had been cut and formed into a rude arbor, underneath which was a pile of dry grass and several dilapidated articles of wearing apparel, among them a garment or two that had evidently belonged to a woman. Scattered around on the ground were a number of tin cans, an earthen crock and a broken skillet. Bones, feathers and corn husks also littered the ground and hanging in the fork of a tree was the carcass of a very young mule, which evidently had been slaughtered and partly devoured by the wild man. The party watched the camping place throughout Saturday night in the hope that the man would come in, but the vigil was without reward. An all-day quest for him on Sunday failed to reveal his whereabouts, and it is now believed the wild man has departed from the locality."

The folklore of many cultures contains tales of "booger men," wild men, and feral children. The famous case of Ishi, the last of an aboriginal Indian tribe in California, proves that it is possible for primitive peoples to exist in modern times. There remain many areas in the world that are remote enough for a wild man to exist. With all of mankind's intellectual and technological sophistication, sometimes we forget that we are ultimately still members of the animal kingdom.

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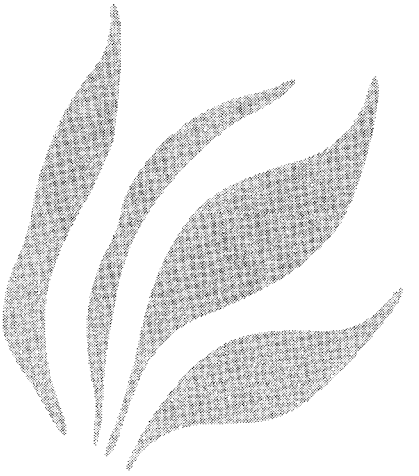
THE GHOST RANCH OF THE OWYHEES

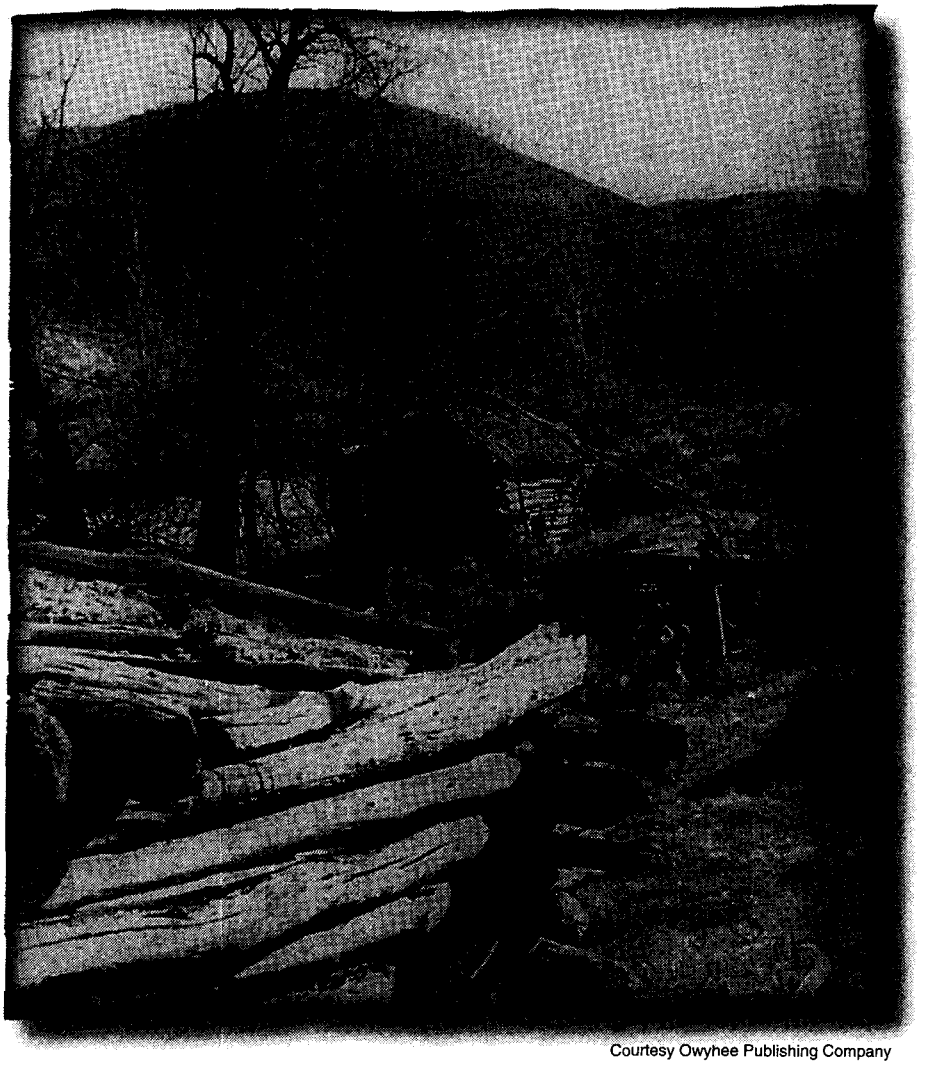


By Hank Corless • Illustrated by Gary Zaboly

Jack Hunt didn't like the dark. He liked it even less when he had to drive the Scotch Bob Road near the old Thomas place. He cursed himself under his breath, regretting that he had dallied along the way, letting the sun go down before he had cleared the summit and put the ranch far behind him. In the bottom of Sinker Creek Canyon, the September winds of 1913 had stripped the leaves from the trees and now they stood out like long spectral fingers clawing at the night sky.

Taking another swig of "nerve" from the quart of Cyrus Noble, Jack listened fearfully to the moaning of the wind and to the incessant creaking of the wagon's wheels. Although he always made it a point not to think of the weird stories and "strange happening" that had occurred there over the years, it was downright spooky in the bottom of the canyon. And the dark, sinister shadows made him even more edgy.

He took the last pull of whiskey and sent the empty bottle sailing into the dark. Then, cracking the reins, he let out a loud yell and felt the jolt as the twelve-horse freight team lurched against their har-



Courtesy Owyhee Publishing Company

The Sinker Creek Ghost Ranch.

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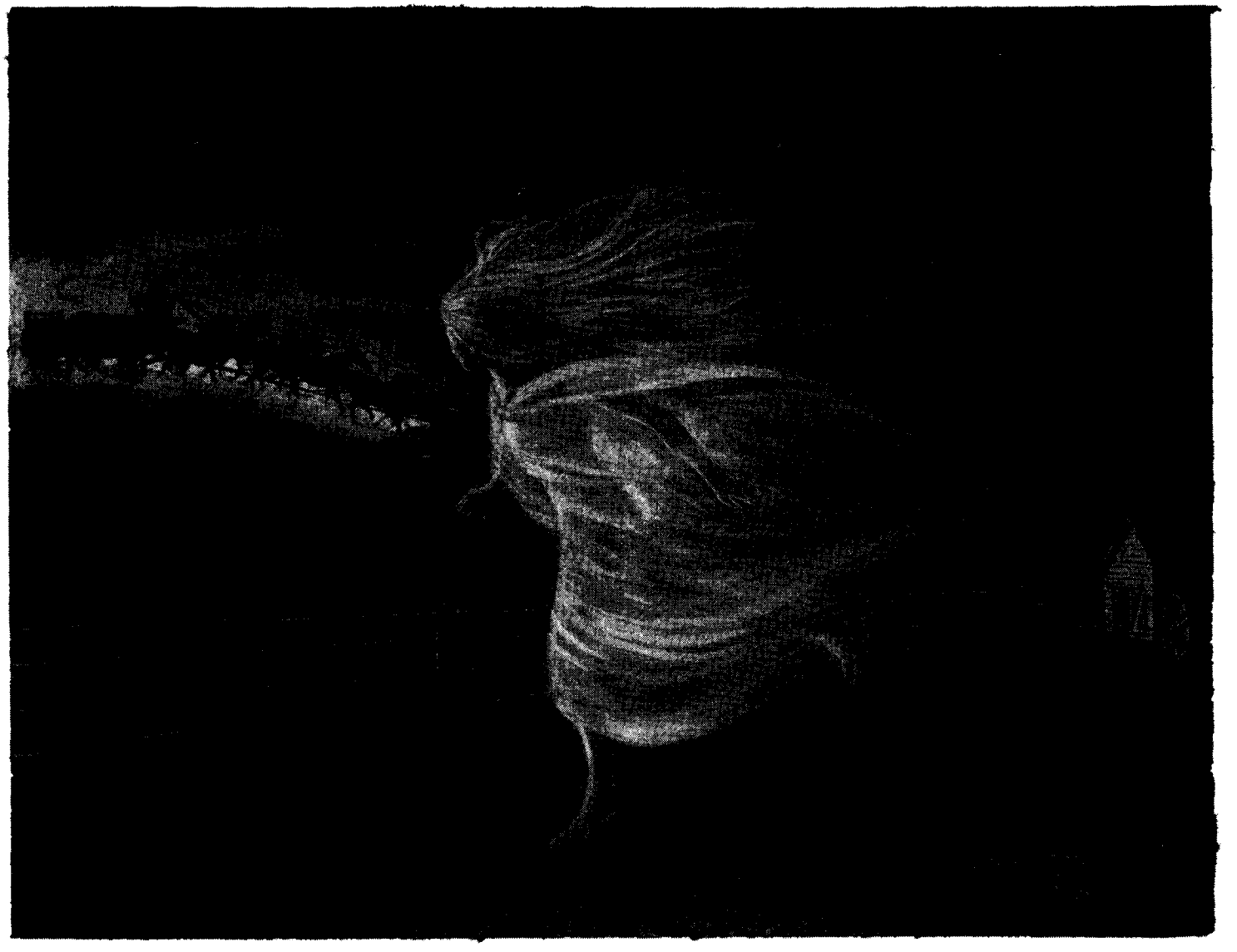

nesses, crossed the narrow wooden bridge, and started their long climb toward the canyon rim and the Drollinger Station.

The Owyhee country of southwestern Idaho, Richard Thomas knew, had long been known as one of the most desolate, rugged, and inhospitable areas in the entire Pacific Northwest, but it was also full of gold and silver. Maybe that was why he decided to settle there. Born in England, Dick emigrated to the United States and made his way to the mining camp of Fairview, Idaho Territory, soon finding work as a miner on nearby Reynolds Creek. In 1881, at the age of twenty-five, Dick married Sally Schneider. Sally was a woman of questionable character who had worked as a Hurdy Gurdy in nearby Silver City, the county seat and hub of the mining district. They acquired a small, isolated ranch on Sinker Creek, a tributary draining eastward out of the War Eagle foothills toward the Snake River Plains. Sinker Creek was known as the site of several early-day tragedies, including the destruction of an entire wagon train by Indians in 1860.

Life on Sinker Creek was far from quiet for Tom and Sally, as they were always quarreling and bickering. To say that they were at war with each other would have been an understatement. Once, in a fit of rage, Sally threw a piece of firewood at Dick and broke his leg. During several of their bouts Dick had even accused her of trying to kill him while he was sleeping. Why they stayed together is a mystery, as their battles led to several separations over the years. But, as always, they were soon back together again, and plotting another feud.

Sally's sister and brother-in-law, a man named Murphy, eventually moved to the area and settled on a ranch above the Thomases. It didn't take long for the Murphys to become embroiled in Dick and Sally's conflicts. In February 1896, Murphy went to a neighboring ranch down Sinker Creek and tried to borrow a gun. When asked what he needed it for Murphy declared he needed it to kill Dick Thomas. When the neighbor refused, Murphy stated he would get a gun somewhere else and rode off. Murphy and Thomas must have patched things up because nothing came of the threat and Dick contin-

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ued to go about his business.

That is, until the end of April 1896. That was when word reached Silver City that the Thomases had vanished without a trace.

When Sheriff John Joyce arrived to investigate, he found the horses all there, along with Dick and Sally's riding saddles and the wagons, and began to note the suspicious circumstances surrounding the couple's strange disappearance. Not only had the cabin door been bolted from the inside, but dinner was sitting on the table, and food was still in the cooking pots. Further, all their possessions appeared to be intact, including Sally's best dresses. The only thing missing was Dick's dress suit. If the couple had deserted the place, they had done so hastily because Dick's hunting knife and wallet were still laying on a chair.

Courtesy Owyhee Publishing Company

Cowboy Frank McMahan reported seeing Dick Thomas in Victoria, B.C., following his disappearance.

A search down by the creek revealed something that alerted Joyce to the possibility of foul play. He came across Sally's dog, whose head had been crushed from a mighty blow. The animal had been buried in a shallow grave, but the spring flood waters in the creek had washed it out.

Sheriff Joyce was alarmed, and for good reason. His family's ranch was nearby and his father had died following an accident three years earlier, thus leaving Joyce's mother a widow. If a murderer was somewhere in the vicinity, he wanted to know.

He immediately rode down to the Snake River and checked the local ferries to see if either or both of the Thomases had crossed the river recently. The ferry operators assured him they had not seen the couple, nor had anyone else along the several roads leading out of the county.

As the investigation continued over the next few days other evidence came to light. Three weeks before the Thomases had disappeared, Sally had visited a nearby woodcutter's camp and obtained a large amount of strychnine with the explanation that she needed it to poison squirrels. The sheriff was more than curious about that piece of information because for months Dick had complained to friends that he was afraid his wife might poison him. The man had even acqired the habit of eating only after his wife had taken a few bites of her own food first.

Rumors and speculation abounded as word spread throughout the county. At least one source claimed that Dick Thomas had a great deal of money stashed away, the result of a recent cattle sale, and opinions circulated that one might have killed the other over it. That a murder had been committed was never doubted for an instant, but the question posed by the local newspaper remained: who had killed who? Were they both murdered by some unknown party, or had Sally actually killed Dick and then made her escape with the missing money? Many people in Silver City certainly thought so. After all, the *Owyhee Avalanche* was quick to point out, Dick was a man of "good character" while Sally, even though she was "industrious and energetic," had once been "a woman of the town."

Undoubtedly, Sally would have been blamed for the deed except for several incidents a few years later that added a new twist to the theory.

The first was a number of unconfirmed sightings of Dick Thomas. A well-known, local cowboy, Frank McMahan, claimed to have spotted Thomas in Victoria, British Columbia, sometime after the supposed murders. This coincided with another observer who reported that Dick Thomas had been seen in Alaska. This put forward the possibility that Thomas was still alive and was now somewhere on the Klondike.

The second incident, and one that nearly clears Sally of any wrong doing, was the discovery of a skull near the Thomas ranch by a local sheepherder in the spring of 1898. The herder claimed to have found it near a shallow grave and told the new sheriff of Owyhee County, Asbury B. Crocheron, that there had been some buttons and charred bones nearby. Like Sheriff John Joyce before him, Crocheron's family also had several ranches on Sinker Creek, and he was deeply interested in solving the mystery. A thorough search was done, but the grave itself was never found. But when Crocheron brought the skull into town, it was quickly identified by local physicians as belonging to a middle-aged woman who had been dead three or four years.

Although Sheriff Crocheron continued the investigation begun by his predecessor, the strange case of Dick and Sally Thomas was never solved and their disappearance remains a mystery to this day.

But the story doesn't end there. Three months after the Thomases disappeared, Sally's sister and family moved to the vacated ranch. One day that summer Mrs. Murphy was washing clothes in the yard when a rock was thrown from the direction of the creek, striking her in the head and knocking her unconscious. When a check was later made of the area, no clues or footprints were found as to who the rock thrower might have been.

Even more astounding is the report of yet another disappearance in November of that year. A man who had been hired to irrigate the pastures vanished one day and was never seen again. That was enough

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for the Murphys. They packed their bags and moved to De Lamar, a town not far from Silver City.

And that was when the stories and rumors began that a ghost was haunting the area.

Throwing more fuel on the fire was an account of the death of an Indian woman who had died at the nearby Drollinger Stage Station. She had been married to a white man named Cave Beck, a man who had the habit of dropping out of sight for long periods of time and leaving his wife to shift for herself. In 1894, two years before the Thomases disappeared, Beck took off on one of his wanderings and the unfortunate woman, who had just given birth to a child, starved to death rather than ask her neighbors for help.

Nor was she the first to die in the vicinity. A Chinese employee from the Joyce Ranch had disappeared a few years earlier and wasn't found until a year later at nearby Whiskey Hill. Strangely, the feet and lower legs were missing from the corpse. The sheriff suspected that the Oriental had been the victim of "foul play," but here again, like the other cases of "strange disappearances" and "possible murders" which had plagued the area, the death of the ranch hand was never solved.

People began avoiding the old Thomas place and the legend of the "Ghost Ranch" was born. Rumors continued to circulate that other strange happenings and violent deaths had taken place on or near the ranch. But not everyone believed it. One such man was a fellow by the name of Brooks. He had little time for such nonsense about ghosts. He purchased the Thomas spread at a good price and moved there with his wife and son. One night that summer they heard strange noises coming from the barn and his son went to investigate. When the lad failed to return, they went to check on him. The couple found the lad on the barn floor, dead from a blow to the head. The actual cause was never determined, but it was thought at the time that a horse might have kicked him. Brooks sold out and left the area.

Courtesy Owyhee Publishing Company

In this group photo, Sheriff John Joyce is standing third from the left. His successor, Asbury B. Crocheron, is on the far right.

For a while after the turn of the century accounts of strange, unexplained incidents continued to circulate around Sinker Creek, but not all turned out to be bad. A Silver City resident named Ned Williams told one story for many years. He and his father-in-law, G.A. Bergh, were in a car one winter that broke an axle near Whiskey Hill. Ned stayed with the car while Bergh took off for town to arrange for repairs. That night Ned built two sagebrush fires and lay down between them to keep warm. It wasn't long before he was fast asleep. Upon awakening the next morning, he was astonished and shaken to find that not only were the fires still burning, but his supply of sage had been replenished.

Whether or not the freighter, Jack Hunt, was thinking of all these incidents as he crested the top of Sinker Canyon is not known. What is known was that when he got to the top of the rim, he hauled for Drollinger Station as fast as the twelve horses would go. He found the station house dark and deserted when he got there, and there was no sign of the station keeper. Alone, he went on to the barn and began unhitching the teams.

Something strange happened then. As he dropped a harness strap on one side of a team, a strap would drop on the other. The hair prickled on the back of his neck, but when he looked, no one was there. Trying to control his imagination, Hunt unhitched another team. But when it happened again, it was too much for Hunt. He immediately sprang to the back of the lead horse and raced for Silver City where he reported the "goings on" to his employers, and absolutely refused to return. The freight owners left for the station to check on the abandoned teams and to see for themselves what had scared the "hell and high water" out of Jack Hunt.

But they were not prepared for what they found when they reached the deserted station. The horses were all in their stalls, quietly munching hay, while over on the wall, the leather harnesses were hanging neatly on wooden pegs.

The ghosts of Sinker Creek are gone now, but the Ghost Ranch is still there, serving as a pasture for the Joyce Livestock Company. The old stories and eerie tales still circulate the Owyhee country, told around the bunkhouses and dining room tables whenever the subject of Dick and Sally Thomas come up—the tellers claiming the stories to be part of the True West.

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A ROCK FROM THE SKY

By David F. Crosby
Illustrated by Graham Ward

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In 1856 few white men ventured into Comancheria except for United States Army patrols or Texas Rangers—and only when well armed and in strength. Even then it took a mission of great importance or desperation to justify the risk, such as the pursuit of a war party with white captives, a preemptive strike against a hostile camp, or a survey ordered by the federal or state government. So to some it would seem foolhardy, to others simply mad, for white men to ride into Comanche country to retrieve a rock. But Major Robert S. Neighbors was no ordinary man, and this was no ordinary rock.

In the spring of 1856, Major Neighbors sent troopers from Fort Belknap, Texas, to the Red River area in what is now Wichita County, Texas, with orders to bring back the Comanches' fabled "Medicine Rock."

Robert S. Neighbors was born in Charlotte County, Virginia, on November 3, 1815, and was orphaned four months later. After receiving a fine education from private tutors hired by his guardian, Samuel Hamner, Neighbors drifted to Louisiana. In the spring of 1836, at age twenty, Neighbors arrived in Texas.

Neighbors soon found Texas needed soldiers, and in 1839 he joined the Texas army as a lieutenant. He rose to the rank of captain and the important position of acting quartermaster of the Texas army. His service ended in 1841, but the position revealed his honesty, integrity, and intelligence to all he met—and he met many powerful men.

Neighbors' next test came on September 11, 1842. As a member of John C. Hays' company of volunteer Texas Rangers, he was in San Antonio to attend court when General Adrian Woll of the Mexican Army took the town during a surprise invasion. Neighbors and forty other Texans were captured, including the officers of the court. Woll took Neighbors and the other prisoners back to Mexico and prison. There, once again, Neighbors revealed a natural courage that impressed his fellow Texans.

Neighbors was released on March 24, 1844, and he returned to Texas. So when Texas needed a man to act as its Indian agent in early 1845—an almost impossible job because it required the agent to win the confidence of the Indians without losing the confidence of the whites—Robert S. Neighbors was asked to do the impossible. He accepted.

Neighbors brought a totally new approach to the job. Instead of remaining at the agency and waiting for Indians to pay him a visit for their rations, he instituted the field system—he rode into their territory and dealt with them there. It worked; he won not only the respect of the friendly Tonkawas but also the fierce Comanches. Soon Neighbors could ride unmolested far beyond the frontier line. He quietly became one of the few white men Texas Indians truly trusted.

On December 29, 1845, the Republic of Texas era ended, and the State of Texas era began. Neighbors' authority as an Indian agent ended with the Republic, but his value did not. He took part in several councils between United States commissioners, settlers, and Texas Indians. It came as no surprise when Neighbors received a federal appointment as an Indian agent on March 20, 1847.

The U.S. Army had no doubt that it could use the services of a man who knew the land beyond the frontier as Neighbors did, and in early 1849, Major General William J. Worth, commander of the Eighth Military District, headquartered in San Antonio, chose Neighbors to lead an expedition to establish a wagon road from near present-day Waco to El Paso.

Neighbors selected eight equally strong men to accompany him on the expedition: John S. (Rip) Ford, D.C. Sullivan, A.D. Neal, Delaware scouts James Shaw and John Harry, and Shawnees Joe Ellis and Patrick Goin. Neighbors then contracted with Buffalo Hump, a Comanche chief, to guide the party to El Paso. It was an action only he could have pulled off. The Comanches jealously guarded entry into their territory.

The expedition left Torrey Trading House (near present-day Waco) on March 23, 1849, headed for El Paso. They soon ran into trouble. Other Comanches, suspecting that a road meant more whites, persuaded Buffalo Hump to desert the group. Neighbors quickly proved General Worth had chosen his man well—he recruited another Comanche chief, Guadeloupe, to act as a guide. The expedition reached El Paso on May 2, 1849, after twenty-three days of travel. Neighbors road became known as the northern route and served Texas well. Later, the Butterfield Overland Mail ran along a portion of the northern route, from the Concho River to El Paso.

Although Neighbors had proved invaluable, he had one flaw—he was a Democrat. On March 4, 1849, President Zachary Taylor, a Whig, took the oath of office. In September 1849, Neighbors' services were terminated for political reasons.

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The Whigs might have decided they didn't need the services of a Democrat, but Texas had no doubt that it could use the services of a man like Neighbors. His fellow citizens elected him to the Fourth Texas Legislature where he served from 1851 to 1853. While in office, he sponsored a bill to establish Indian reservations in Texas.

In 1853, the Franklin Pierce Administration, once again, appointed Neighbors as the supervising Indian agent for Texas Indians, and ironically, in 1854, Neighbors joined an expedition to northwest Texas to find suitable locations for the reservations he had sponsored in the legislature.

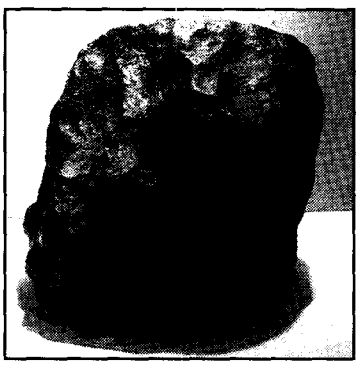
A site in what is now Throckmorton County, Texas, was chosen for the Penateka Comanches, while a second reservation was established in Young County for lesser Texas tribes. The army both protected and policed the reservations from nearby Fort Belknap and Camp Cooper.

During his expeditions into Comancheria, Neighbors heard from his wards of a "Medicine Rock" in the country now known as Wichita County. Neighbors found the metallic stone near the Red River, where several Indian trails converged. The Comanches believed the meteorite was a gift from the Great Spirit, possessing curative powers. Warriors would leave offerings of arrowheads, beads, and tokens next to the reddish-iron rock.

The 320-pound (Neighbors estimated its weight at 500 pounds) elongated, pear-shaped "Medicine Rock" was a beautiful specimen of a meteorite, and an extraordinary curiosity at the time. Neighbors needed a wagon to haul his find out of Indian country, and he ordered the troopers from Fort Belknap to take one with them.

With the meteorite safely at the fort, Neighbors wrote Texas Governor E.M Pease about the recovery of the stone.

> I have also found and send down by same conveyance the Meteoric Stone or Iron that I spoke to you about. It is a beautiful specimen—and weighs about 500 lbs. I landed it at Clear Fork and have had no opportunity of getting its correct dimensions—as yet. I shall be in Austin during the next month and wish to consult you about what disposition to make of it. It is a regular meteor and no mistake, and is as heavy as the same sized piece of lead.



Author's photo

The Comanche "Medicine Rock" is on display at the Texas Memorial Museum in Austin, Texas.

Neighbors called San Antonio home, and he sent the meteorite there first, where it made the rounds as a curiosity. Next the "Medicine Rock" traveled to Austin and went on permanent display in the capitol's geological exhibit. Among the exhibits were many valuable fossils and precious stones gathered from the vast regions of Texas.

Tragically, Major Neighbors died in an ambush on September 14, 1859. In August, he had successfully moved the Texas reservation Indians to Indian Territory, where they were out of reach of vengeful Texans, an act that made him a hated man in some quarters. On his return trip, he stopped in Belknap, a small village outside Fort Belknap to write and post letters closing his affairs as an Indian agent. After leaving the county clerk's office, Major Neighbors decided to visit a friend who was in Fort Belknap's small hospital, but before he had walked more than fifty paces from the clerk's office, a local troublemaker by the name of Patrick Murphy, a gun in his hand, stopped Neighbors and said: "Neighbors, I understand that you have said that I am a horse-thief. Is it so?"

Neighbors put his own hand on his pistol and started to explain that Murphy was mistaken, but Murphy's confrontation was just a distraction. Hidden behind a chimney to Neighbors' rear stood Edward Cornett, Murphy's brother-in-law, who was armed with a double-barreled shotgun. Cornett quickly stepped out from behind the chimney and fired both barrels into Neighbors' back at close range. Neighbors exclaimed, "Oh, Lord," and then collapsed to the ground and died.

Texans of the day didn't tolerate a back shooter. In April 1860, Texas Rangers cornered Edward Cornett on Salt Creek and killed him in a gun battle.

Long after Neighbors lay buried in the Fort Belknap Cemetery, his "Medicine Rock" remained on display at the Texas capitol. And then on November 9, 1881, the capitol caught fire. It began in a room used to store the records of the Texas Supreme Court and quickly engulfed the entire structure. The blaze claimed many priceless paintings, books, trophies of war, and geologic exhibits—but Neighbor's meteorite, which had survived a fiery plunge through the atmosphere, simply fell with the other debris into the ruins. Not even scorched by the fire, workers recovered the stone once so revered by the Comanches and turned it over to the University of Texas.

Today, Neighbors' meteorite, a stone from another world with an Old West history, resides in the Texas Memorial Museum at the University of Texas in Austin. We will never know if the Comanches who visited the "Medicine Rock" had their prayers answered, but we do know that Major Robert Neighbors had his answered. Generations after his death, all Texans can view the meteorite in safety and peace.

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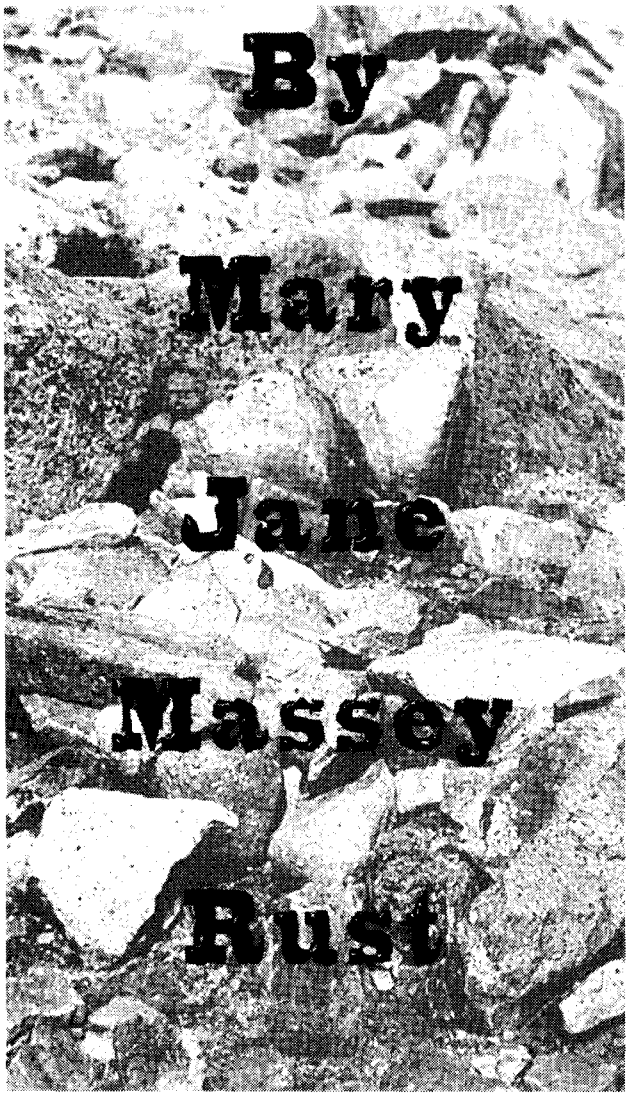
Mischief at the Summit



By Mary Jane Massey Rust

On October 11, 1873, the United States Army opened a weather signal station on the summit of Pikes Peak. Constructed of the rocks so plentiful on site, the building was made to withstand the mountain top's occasional 100 mile-per-hour winds. Using the newly-installed telegraph line, men stationed at the high-altitude outpost sent down some very interesting statistics.

One message reported that water froze at 34°F and boiled at 178°F, and boiled potatoes took hours to cook. The Pikes Peak soldiers also tended to take advantage of "flatlander" gullibility, resorting to varying degrees of hyperbole. A Sergeant Seyboth, the first man in charge, sent word of pumpkin-sized hailstones, thunder that deafened him for weeks, and his greatest story—a detailed description of a sea serpent gliding through the waters of Lake Moraine, just below timberline.

But by far the most outrageous report came from Sergeant John O'Keefe in the summer of 1876. His impassioned story of enormous man-eating Pikes Peak rats caught the country's attention. It was elaborated upon by a Colorado Springs court magistrate and part-time newspaper reporter by the name of Eliphalet Price. Judge Price knew that leading newspapers would eagerly

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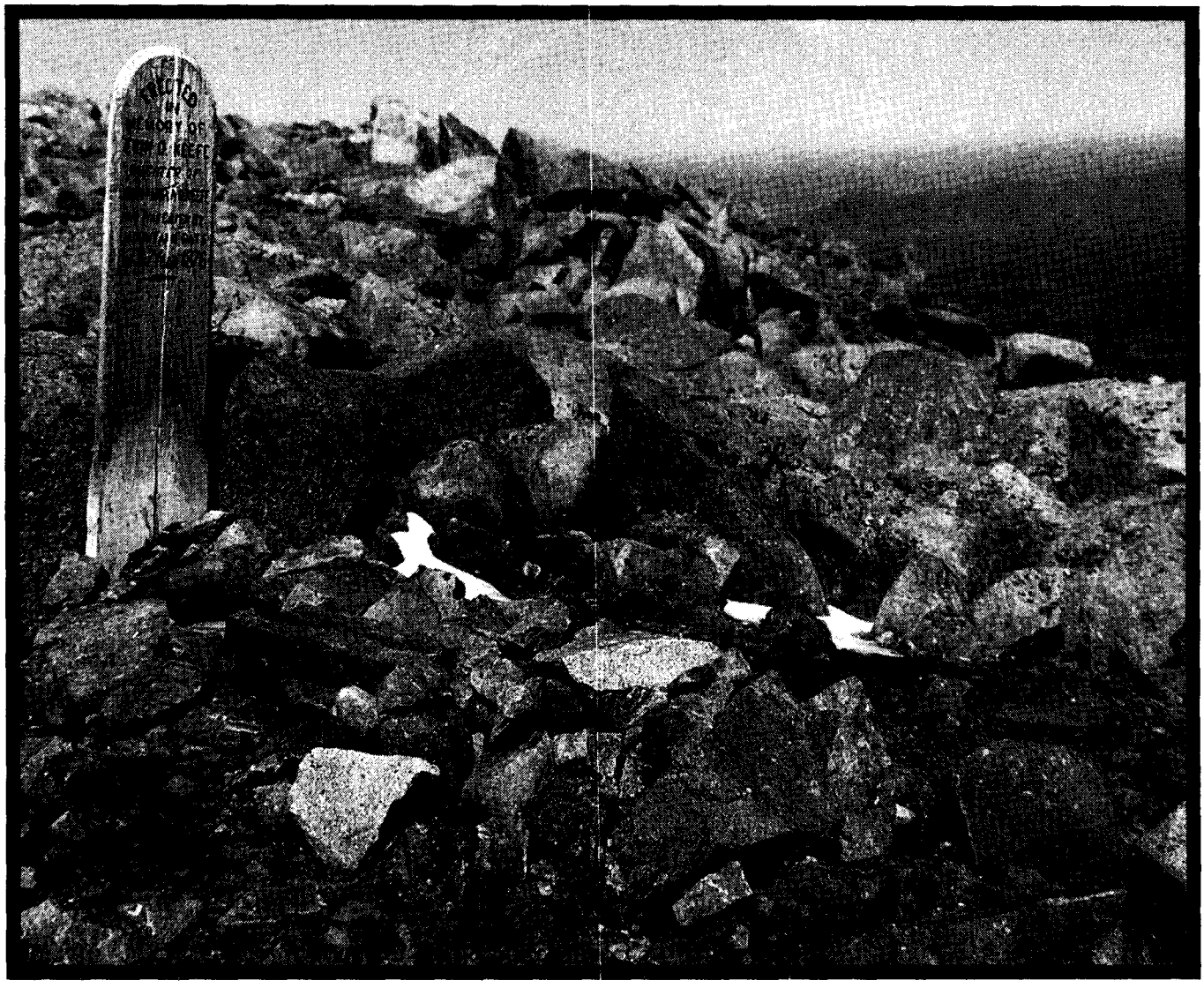

Local History Collection, Pikes Peak Library District

The grave of Erin O'Keefe, "eaten by mountain rats," 1876.

snap up strange stories initiated at the 14,110-foot peak.

O'Keefe, aided and abetted by Price, wrote that rodent monsters attacked his wife, Nora, and baby daughter Erin, while he was adding stones to the roof of the weather station to keep it from flying off in a growing storm. He returned to find his wife surrounded by the fierce creatures. He placed spikes of metal around her as a shield and, fashioning lengths of stove pipe into leggings for himself, attempted to club the giant rats to death. When the O'Keefes finally got to their child, they discovered with horror that she had been devoured. Only a few bones were left. They buried their little daughter's remains near the station and sent off a photograph of the grave marker that included these words:

> Fair Cynthia with her starry train
> Shall miss thee in thy silent rest,
> And waft one sweet, on spheric strain
> To Erin dear, among the blest.
> Erected by Sergeant John Nora O'Keefe to the memory of their infant daughter, Erin O'Keefe, who was destroyed by mountain rats May 25, A.D. 1876.

Newspapers all over the nation published the wild tale. The U.S. Army, after delivering a reprimand to Sergeant O'Keefe, issued a statement denying the whole affair. It seems there was no daughter, let alone a Mrs. O'Keefe. But there was a black cat named Erin that had died a natural death at the weather station. Dr. Henry K. Palmer, who had given the cat to the men at the summit, wrote his own exposé of the hoax in 1876. As the national furor gradually died down, the people of Colorado went back to planning the celebration in honor of their territory, soon to become the Centennial State of the Union on August 1, 1876. The Pikes Peak weather station was closed in 1888.

Colorado Springs Utilities along with local meteorologists currently operate an unmanned temperature and wind measurement system at the site. Weather information and prediction is enhanced by the latest in high-tech meteorology, but there is no one there to tell stories.

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THE MAN WHO PUT A HEX ON SAN FRANCISCO

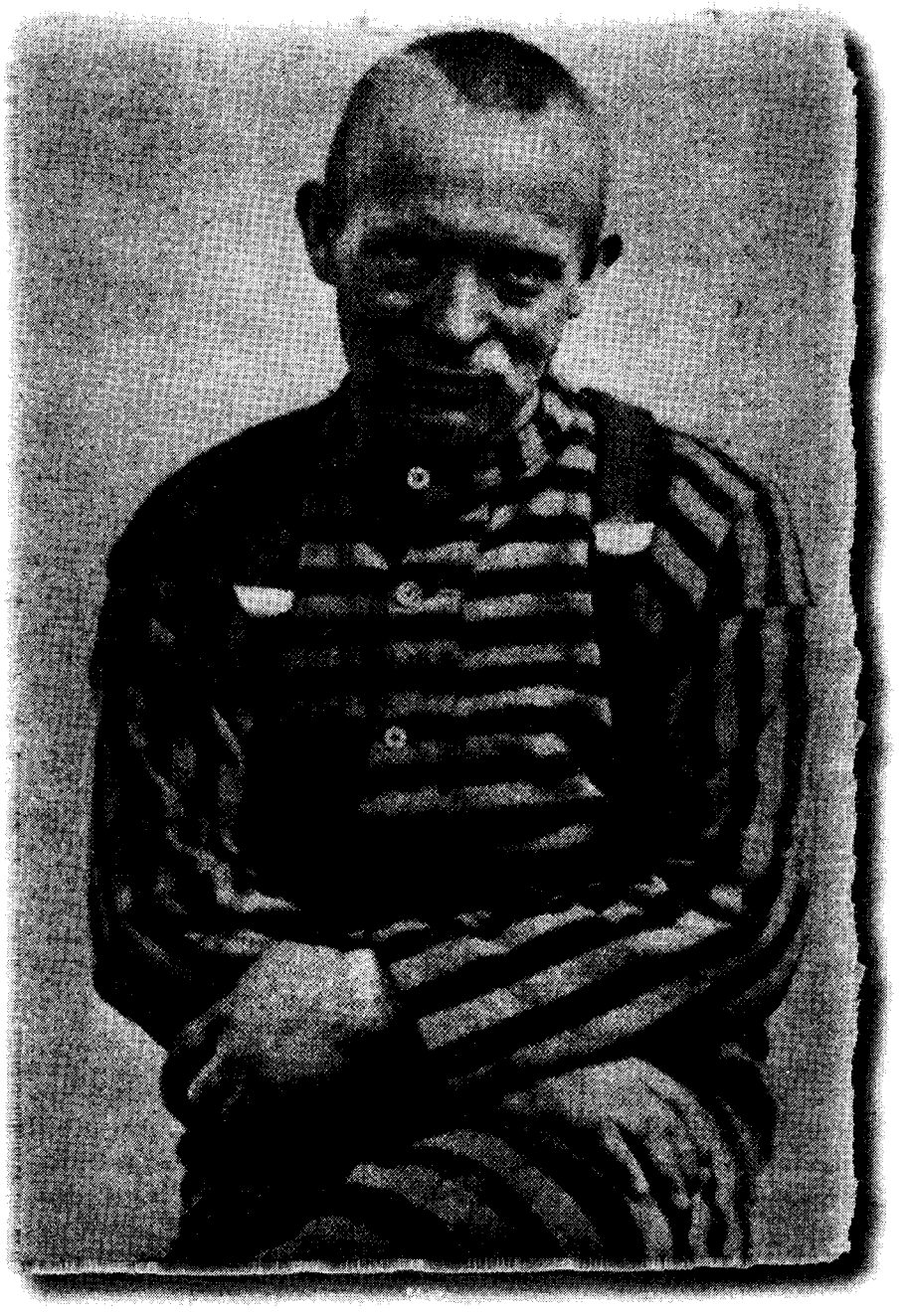
By Jan Holden

May 7, 1906, was a fine spring day in Seattle, Washington—a fine day for an early breakfast, a stroll, and some window shopping. Maude Creffield was keen to buy a stylish new dress she had spied the day before. Joshua Creffield humored his wife and sauntered on ahead to the corner of First and Cherry. It was there that George Mitchell stepped quickly behind Creffield, placed a gun to the older man's ear, and fired. Creffield died on the spot.

There was no flight, not even a struggle. When police officers arrived on the scene George Mitchell simply handed over his pistol and went calmly to jail. He was charged with first degree murder, and a trial ensued that made headlines throughout the Northwest.

Perhaps the murder of Joshua Creffield would never have created such a stir had his wife Maude not insisted that her husband was immortal. "He will rise again in three days," she screamed, even as he was being laid to rest in Seattle's Lake View Cemetery. And it was not only Maude Creffield who believed. It was scores of followers, most of them from Corvallis, Oregon, who were counting the hours till their master's return.

Born Franz Edmond Creffield, the self-proclaimed prophet called himself "Joshua the Second." Though Creffield's early history is sketchy, it has been suggested by earlier reporters that he deserted the German army and trained for



Author's Collection

Franz Edmund Creffield, alias "Joshua," in his Oregon penitentiary "uniform," 1904.

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Author's Collection

Esther Mitchell, taken in 1906 while she was incarcerated for the murder of her brother George.

the priesthood in Europe. Upon arriving in Portland, Oregon, in 1903, Creffield became an avid supporter of the Salvation Army and was involved in its charitable activities. Just what convinced Creffield to start his own church is unclear. However, that same year he arrived in Corvallis, Oregon, Creffield lured away several Salvation Army workers and set up his own headquarters on Second Street.

Soon the townsfolk were talking about Brother Creffield's bizarre worship services. It seems that, with few exceptions, his converts were female. Harmonious Corvallis households were diminishing rapidly, with wives and daughters forsaking the hearth to seek spiritual fulfillment under the guidance of Joshua Creffield. One man returned late from work to find a note pinned to the pillow beside his own: "I don't want to leave in the daytime because the children will see me and cry to go with me. I must leave while they are asleep...." The man knew his wife had joined the ranks of Creffield's fast-growing "Bride of Christ Church." He was convinced that the unholy prophet had some strange hypnotic power over these women and that it was up to him to put an end to the gospel according to Creffield.

The enraged husband had no trouble securing a twenty-man posse. On the evening of January 4, 1904, the group of forsaken husbands set out to bring back their women from the home of O.V. Hurt, a prominent businessman who had taken Creffield under his wing. When the posse arrived there was a gospel meeting in progress. There was also an enormous fire blazing in the yard, being fueled by the once-treasured household furnishings of the disciples. Charles Brooks, a former Salvation Army captain, greeted the men on the porch, explaining that there was no reason for alarm—Brother Creffield was in direct communication with the Almighty and there had been a divine dictum demanding the destruction of all earthly possessions.

The men were having none of it. They barged through the door, grabbed brothers Brooks and Creffield, and ran the pair out of town. There the men were stripped and treated to a coat of tar and feathers. Their final instructions were to keep running and never return to Corvallis.

One warning was enough for Charles Brooks. He parted company with Creffield and was never heard of again. But Joshua was not one to give in to defeat. He had taken the name of a Biblical hero, and who was to say that he couldn't bring down the walls of Corvallis, just as his predecessor had done with the walls of Jericho. There was another reason Creffield was reluctant to leave town. He wanted to marry Maude Hurt, daughter of O.V. Hurt. It was no secret that Maude was just as smitten with the hairy apostle.

The Corvallis papers ran an excit-

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Creffield carried on his "underground" ministry with moderate success until the bulk of his followers were carted away to the insane asylum.

ing sequel to the tar and feathers story by announcing: "JOSHUA THE SECOND, STILL GIVING OFF STRONGLY WITH THE SCENT OF TAR, HAS TAKEN MAUDE HURT AS HIS BRIDE JUST ONE DAY AFTER FLIGHT."

The couple spent a brief honeymoon in Portland then returned to Corvallis where the groom, still unpopular with many of the locals, dug a shallow trench under the Hurt home and took up a two-month residency while his wife and friends provided food and company in the evenings. It was declared by his staunchest supporters that Joshua Creffield could deliver a more potent sermon through the crack in a cement foundation than the town parson could give from a pulpit.

Creffield carried on his "underground" ministry with moderate success until the bulk of his followers were carted away to the insane asylum. After that, there was little the man could do but come out of hiding and agree to go with authorities. Creffield was taken into custody and charged with licentious behavior. He was sentenced to two years in the state's prison at Salem but was released in fifteen months for good behavior.

During those fifteen months of confinement, Creffield's wife Maude filed for divorce and the fanatical followers of the Oregon guru scattered. But the prophet still had luck on his side. Upon his release from the penitentiary in February 1906, Joshua Creffield traveled to San Francisco, where he later claimed to have laid the curse that resulted in one of the most disastrous earthquakes in United States history. He returned to Corvallis taking credit for the devastation, remarried Maude, and regained a portion of his flock. The cult decided to establish a new "Garden of Eden" and within a few weeks had moved to the Oregon coastal town of Waldport.

Though few Corvallis citizens knew or even cared where the prophet had gone, there was one father who was particularly distressed to discover that his young daughter had joined the cult. An investigation proved that the girl had taken off on foot in an attempt to walk the ninety miles through the coast range and down to the beach where Creffield and his disciples had established a colony.

Louis Hartley purchased a revolver and ammunition, then hastened to catch up with Creffield and the others. When Hartley finally confronted the prophet, he fired three shots, only to discover that in his haste he had loaded the gun with the wrong type of cartridge. Maude Creffield laughed at Hartley's failed attempt. It was beginning to look like there might be some truth in her long-held belief that her husband was indestructible.

Creffield's fortunate escape caused him to reconsider his plans. Though he and his followers had barely set foot on the sands of their coastal paradise, he announced his decision to leave his flock for a few days of meditation and soul serachin. The apostle did not, however, plan to meditate alone. Along with his wife, Creffield invited a pretty

Author's Collection

Joshua Creffield, taken in 1904, directly after the self-proclaimed prophet emerged from his underground hideout.

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Author's Collection

Joshua Creffield's grave, Lakeview Cemetery, Seattle

young convert named Esther Mitchell to accompany him on a trip to Seattle.

Esther, who was just sixteen, had run away from home despite the warnings of her older brother, George. It seems that because of her youth and beauty, Creffield had promised her a special place in his kingdom. Esther Mitchell was to be granted the distinction of becoming the second mother of Christ. Apparently, Maude had no objections to her husband's decision, for the three set off for Seattle in relative harmony, leaving a small band of the faithful to subsist on shellfish and hope.

When George Mitchell discovered that his sister had been spirited away by Creffield, he hastened to Seattle and was lying in wait for the prophet on the morning of May 7.

George Mitchell's trial began on June 25 and concluded July 10. It was obvious from the beginning that the young man had the public's sympathy and support concerning his act of retaliation. In a stirring story following the incident, the *Seattle Times* declared that Mitchell deserved immediate freedom and should not be considered a criminal for ridding the country of a rascal like Joshua Creffield.

There was a joyous outburst when Mitchell was speedily acquitted. Now it only remained for him to bring his poor, disillusioned sister home to Corvallis.

The Seattle train station was bustling on July 12 as George and his brothers waited to gather up Esther and return home. She was there, pale but smiling. It appeared that the worst was over. Suddenly, Esther slowed her pace, dropped behind the others and pulled a gun from her handbag. The bullet hit George Mitchell in the head. Esther had evened the score. She had taken the life of her brother, a man she hated for murdering her beloved Joshua.

Another Mitchell was taken to trial. Esther surprised many by refusing to plead insanity. "I killed George," she said, "because he murdered an innocent man." Even so, the jury found Esther not guilty by reason of insanity and the girl was committed to the state asylum at Steilacoom. Maude Creffield, also deemed of unsound mind, was held briefly in the King County jail while her fate was under consideration. Authorities found her dead a few days later. An autopsy revealed the presence of strychnine in her stomach, and it was assumed that the prophet's wife had committed suicide.

Esther Mitchell remained at the asylum for approximately three years. She was released in 1909 and paroled on condition that she return to Oregon.

News reports written shortly after Esther's release state that the young woman went to Portland and made an attempt to locate her brother's grave. A short time later Esther Mitchell died at the home of friends in Waldport, Oregon, the spot Joshua Creffield had chosen to be his "Garden of Eden."

Franz Edmond "Joshua" Creffield, his family and his flock of followers are history. His rough, weather-scarred tombstone still stands in Lake View Cemetery—not much of a tribute to the man who put a hex on San Francisco.

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Doc Holliday

"Holliday had a mean disposition and an ungovernable temper, and under the influence of liquor was a most dangerous man..."

—Bat Masterson

True West magazine is proud to present a new line of t-shirts. Featuring original designs by *True West* illustrator Gary Zaboly, the shirts will be offered only for a limited time and are available in six styles, including:

True West 45th Anniversary • The Texas Rangers • The Alamo • Doc Holliday
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A Garrison of Ghosts

The National Cemetery at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, overlooking the base golf course.

Author's Photo

A shadowy figure of a woman, lantern in hand, drifts across a golf course and into the cemetery beyond. A priest clad in a dark robe suddenly materializes on a stairway landing. A Civil War soldier plays a haunting tune on his harmonica as he slowly fades into a mist. Halloween pranks? Perhaps, but military families living at the base in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, would disagree with that conclusion.

Located in the northeastern part of the state, Fort Leavenworth is the oldest fort in continuous use in the United States. It was established on May 8, 1827, by Colonel Henry Leavenworth and the men of the Third Infantry Regiment. They had been ordered by the United States War Department to establish a stronghold on the Missouri River that would protect wagon trains traveling along the Santa Fe and Oregon trails and help to maintain peace with the Indians.

By Shirley Gilfert

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By the 1840s, thousands of wagons had passed through the post on their journey west. Supplies to support these caravans were floated up the Missouri River to the fort in vast quantities. The fort played an important role in both the Mexican War and the Civil War. Many military notables—among them George Armstrong Custer, Philip Sheridan, Douglas MacArthur, and Dwight Eisenhower—have been garrisoned there.

One would expect that such a historic place would spawn many legends, and perhaps the antiquity of its buildings demands at least one ghostly tale. However, no less than twelve of the buildings at the fort, as well as the golf course and the Missouri River, which wends its way past the fort's eastern boundary, claim their own special spectre. Some of these supernatural sightings may be attributed to an overactive imagination or too much wine, but a few of the stories are not so easily discounted.

The Lady in Black, for instance, has been seen by many families who have lived at 16-18 Sumner Place. This ghostly woman is said to be especially fond of children, often comforting fretful babies or reading bedtime stories to toddlers. Apparently, she does not like babysitters or grandparents and purportedly once shoved a hovering grandmother out of the nursery. She usually seems quite beneficent, though. One couple tells of walking into the kitchen of the home and seeing the ghostly lady doing dishes; another couple reported that she often made up the beds in the morning. A former resident relates that she was awakened one night when the lady softly touched her arm and called out her name. Rising from her bed, this mother went immediately to check on the children, for she felt the lady was trying to warn her of some danger; however, all was well.

Such stories have been told so persistently over the years that in 1975 the post chaplain conducted an exorcism of the house. At that time the "Lady" moved next door

The Laughing Ghosts of Old Fort Kearney

By Shirley Gilfert

Fort Kearney, Nebraska, was often called the "Hell Hole of the West," by soldiers who were stationed there. Historians say it got that name because of the lack of comforts provided when the fort was first built. Originally intended to provide protection for travelers on the Oregon Trail, little money was provided for construction, so the soldiers were garrisoned in a few adobe buildings. After two years, the War Department considered abandoning the post because of a lack of appropriations, but then Indian raids increased in the area and it was decided to keep the post open.

With no provisions except those hauled in by wagon, food was bad and uniforms had to be constantly patched. Travelers often noted in their diaries that the soldiers were a ragtag, unsoldierly-looking bunch. Conditions gradually improved, but in the meantime, life on the lonely prairie was miserable, work was boring, and desertions were frequent. Discipline was harsh and mental breakdowns were not uncommon. A soldier's life is a lonely one at best, but under those conditions it sometimes seemed unbearable.

Perhaps the troubles could be blamed only on the poor conditions there, but many say there was another darker reason why so many young men lost their sanity.

Like most summer nights on the Nebraska prairie, August 5, 1857, was hot and humid. Troopers found it difficult to sleep because of the heat, so most of them lay tossing on their bunks knowing that reveille would sound at 5:00 AM whether they slept or not. The only sounds to be heard were the owls hooting in the cottonwood grove nearby and the occasional howl of a coyote.

Suddenly, an unearthly sound, half scream, half

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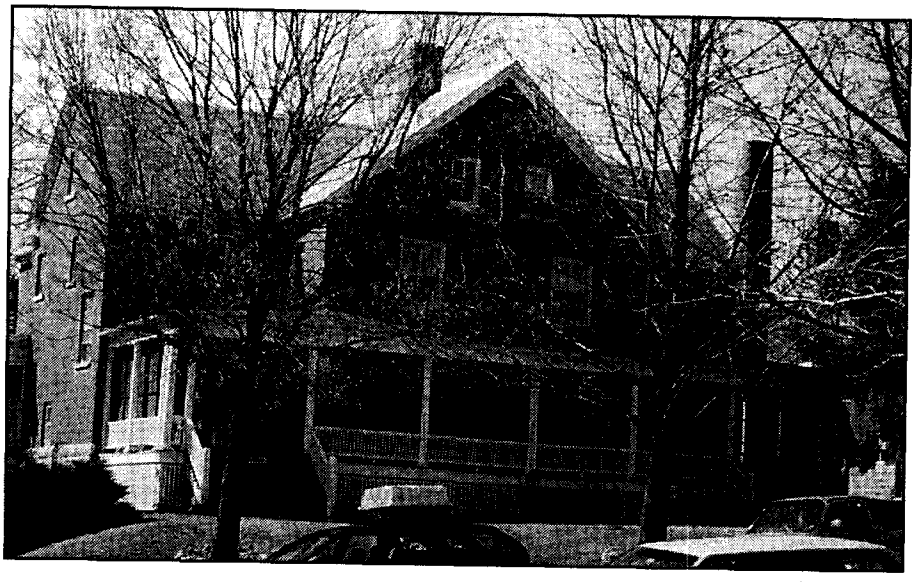
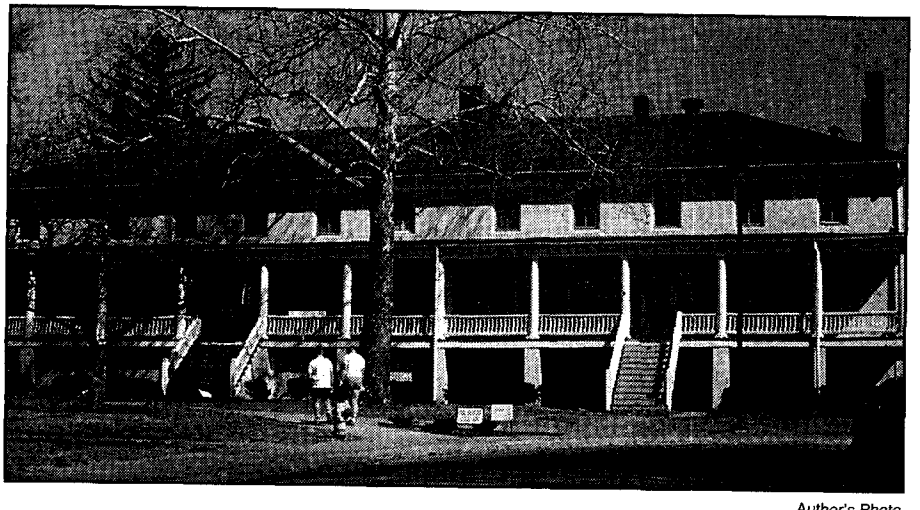
Author's Photo

Post Sutler's House at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.



Author's Photo

The Post General's House at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.



Author's Photo

The Rookery at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

and is now purported to reside in the attic, where passersby often tell of seeing her peer from the round window in the front of the house.

Another recurring tale concerns the spirit of a young Catholic priest known as Father Fred, who has been seen many times on the first stairway landing or near the dining room fireplace at 632 Thomas Avenue. According to post records, a chapel originally stood on the site of this handsome brick home. When the chapel burned to the ground in 1875, a young priest perished in the flames. It is said that his spirit remains in this house and that he joins his occupants for dinner on some evenings. Supposedly, one night while a party was in progress at the house, Father Fred decided to join in the merrymaking and a guest captured his spirit on film.

A third spirit that has taken up residence at the fort has selected a magnificent brick Victorian home that sits high on a bluff overlooking the Missouri. This grand home at 1 Scott Avenue has traditionally been the residence of the highest-ranking officer at the post. Built in 1861 on ground that once served as the old soldiers' cemetery, it was also the scene of an 1870 murder. One would naturally expect that the house, if haunted, would be frequented either by the spirits of the Civil War soldiers whose graves were violated, or by the murder victim, Captain David Hilhouse Buel. But neither is the case. The restless entity that allegedly occupies the first floor bedroom seems to be none other than General George Armstrong Custer. Custer slept here before departing on his last campaign, only to meet his fate at the Little Bighorn.

Next to the general's home sits the second-oldest house on the post. Built in 1841, this house is usually referred to as the Post Sutler's House. Originally built of logs, it has undergone several room additions. Although part of the log structure still exists, it is concealed by walls and partitions. The house was constructed by Hiram Rich, who furnished the troops with tobacco,

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writing paper, whiskey, and other non-issue items. Later, in 1868-1869, Major Phillip Sheridan lived here with his family. Mrs. Sheridan died in this house and believers say hers is the spirit that haunts a small upstairs bedroom—the room in which she drew her last breath. Supposedly, Mrs. Sheridan seeks vengeance on her husband, who left her on her deathbed to attend to urgent business in Chicago. Occupants who sleep in the downstairs bedroom claim the spirit keeps them awake at night with "bed-bumping" and other noises.

Directly across from a tranquil little park on this same street stands a beautiful double-porched brick house that combines features of Georgian, Queen Anne, and Eastlake architecture. Legend has it that sounds of music, quiet conversation, and tinkling tea cups have often been heard in the home. One former officer tells of being awakened one night by the sound of music softly drifting up the stairs. Assuming one of his children had left a radio on, he decided to go downstairs and shut it off. When he was halfway down the steps the music stopped, so he started back up to bed. When he reached the top step, the music started again. Once more he started down and once more the music stopped when he reached the first floor landing. After a third attempt, the man gave up and returned to bed. The music continued to play for some time afterward.

The most historic house on the Fort is known as The Rookery. It is the oldest house in the state of Kansas. Constructed in 1832, it served as the first post headquarters building. Kansas Governor Andrew Reeder lived here in 1854 and the building was later used as a bachelor officers' quarters. Douglas MacArthur lived here as a young lieutenant. It isn't recorded how this building got its strange name but whatever its origins were, the house is rich in folklore and ghost stories.

The most often repeated story about The Rookery describes an old laugh, came from the colonel's quarters, as if the devil himself had come to call. The door to the colonel's quarters opened and out burst young Johnny Backman, the colonel's son. His clothes were ablaze and he was running toward the cottonwood grove north of the fort. The howl of an Irish banshee could not have been more eerie to those men roused from their beds than was the terrifying laughter of the burning boy.

Even more frightening was the fact that even though the night was dark and the flames on Johnny's clothes brilliantly silhouetted his burning form, once he was out of the parade ground he seemed to disappear. Those who ran after him in an attempt to prevent his certain death could find no trace of him. Ever!

No one ever found the reason for Johnny Backman's apparent suicide. His grief-stricken mother sat in a stupor, talking to no one, eating nothing, ceasing to show any awareness of the world around her until the next evening. Then, as twilight fell, again that eerie scream came from Colonel Backman's quarters. The sound of demonic laughter filled the parade ground once more as she ran out, her body in flames, her hair sizzling down her back. She headed in the same direction her son had disappeared, a flaming torch suddenly extinguished and leaving no evidence of the woman, not even a bone or some ash.

Wasn't this enough to make a man doubt his sanity? But even that was not the end. Within a week after the two vanished, whenever the wind blew from the direction of their disappearance, the sound of maniacal laughter could be heard. Was it Johnny and his mother having the last laugh at the soldiers who remained at their miserable outpost? The soldiers believed it was.

Later Fort Kearney would play an important part in settling the West. Conditions improved as more and more settlers depended on the soldiers to protect them from warring tribes, but even after the fort closed in 1871 the mystery of the laughing ghosts was never explained. Why did Johnny Backman and his mother set themselves on fire? Why were they laughing as they ran away? Why was no trace of them ever found? Most intriguing of all, why did their spirits come back to haunt those poor soldiers who remained at "The Hell Hole of the West"?

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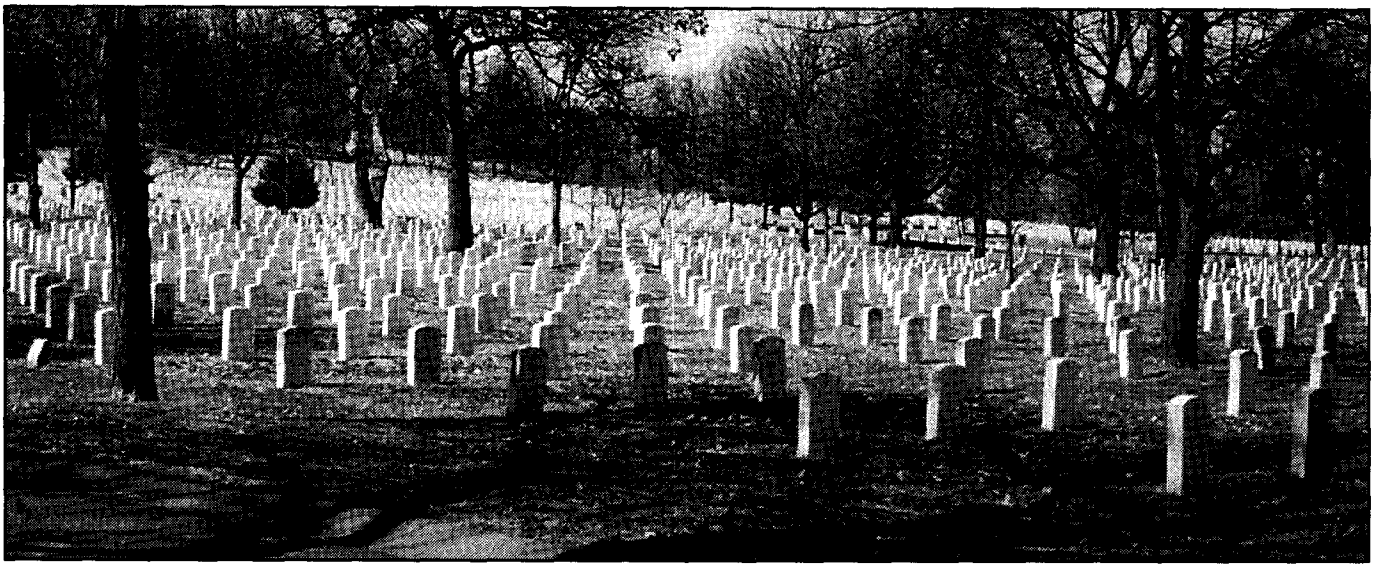

Author's Photo

The National Cemetery at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

woman garbed in a white robe, with white hair standing out around her head. She sometimes sits in a corner chattering, at other times she suddenly rushes forward out of nowhere, screaming and raging incoherently. Speculation is that this insane spirit met a violent death during an Indian attack in the very early days of the fort. Although there is no record of her actually harming anyone, she certainly is the most malevolent of the fort's ghosts and her unexpected appearances cause great consternation.

Ghost stories are told about other buildings on the post as well. One concerns the Officer's Wives Club, where it is said a young Confederate soldier can sometimes be seen gazing wistfully from a basement window. Each time he's been seen, he seems to be staring into the distance, then turns and plays a haunting melody on a harmonica and fades away as the music ends. No one has been able to relate the significance of the building to this young, melancholy phantom.

At least one more story bears repeating. It concerns the National Cemetery and the golf course that lies directly across the street. The spectre that walks these grounds appears only in autumn and has been seen several times on Halloween. A woman, dressed in the fashion of pioneer times and clutching a shawl around her shoulders, suddenly appears out of the evening mists. She carries a lantern in her outstretched hand and it's said if you listen closely, you can hear her calling out, "Ethan...Mary...."

She floats slowly toward the cemetery and disappears among the endless rows of white headstones. There is no response to her eerie call, but she continues to search as she has for 119 years. Her story is a pathetic one.

She floats slowly toward the cemetery and disappears among the endless rows of white headstones. There is no response to her eerie call, but she continues to search as she has for 119 years.

Catherine Suttler, her husband Hiram, and their two children, Ethan and Mary, sojourned at Fort Leavenworth in the autumn of 1880 on their way to a new life in Oregon. One morning the children were sent out to gather firewood. When they hadn't returned by nightfall a search party was organized, but to no avail. After three days and nights all hope was abandoned by everyone except Catherine, and the search was called off. But Catherine simply refused to believe that her children could just vanish. Every night she could be seen wandering the area, lantern in hand, calling over and over for her children. That winter she was stricken with pneumonia and died. Hiram, his entire family gone, returned to his former home in Indiana.

The following spring the children were returned to the fort by some friendly Fox Indians who had fished them out of the Missouri River and cared for them throughout the winter. Mary and Ethan were reunited with their father in Indiana, but it is said Catherine continues to search in death, as she did in life, for her children at Leavenworth, where she is buried in the post cemetery.

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THE GHOST TRAIN ON THE PLAINS

By Gord Tolton • Illustrated by Richard Ignarski

Glenbow Archives NA-131-7

The collision of Canadian Pacific Railroad engines No. 514 and 703 occurred east of Medicine Hat, July 9, 1908.

The Alberta city of Medicine Hat was founded in 1883 as a railroad town, the point where Canada's first transcontinental line crossed the South Saskatchewan River on its way to Calgary and Vancouver. Its name has origins in an obscure legend regarding a Cree-Blackfoot fight and a medicine man that lost his mystical war bonnet. But the story of the Cree shaman and his missing headgear is not the only bit of paranormal activity that haunts this old buffalo ground. Here, trainmen, like sailors, are a superstitious lot, and still speak in hushed tones of the ghost train.

A few miles to the east of Medicine Hat, the tiny town of Dunmore (also sometimes known as "Coleridge") is the point of division on the Canadian Pacific Railroad, where a branch line shoots off to the nearby city of Lethbridge and crosses the Rockies through the Crow's Nest Pass as an alternative route to the Pacific. In 1908, the Crow's Nest line was a part of the route of the Spokane Flyer, a train that connected St. Paul, Minnesota, and the namesake city in Washington state, using the border-hugging Canadian lines. To eliminate the need to climb the grade out of the rail yards at Medicine Hat, it was customary for trainmen to take a fresh engine and tender out of town across seven

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miles "of a fair grade full of cutbacks and curves," to Dunmore, where it would couple to the Spokane Flyer as it changed tracks on its westward route.

This was exactly what engineer Bob Twohey and fireman Gus Day were up to on a June night in 1908, as they climbed the hill out of Medicine Hat onto the benchland.

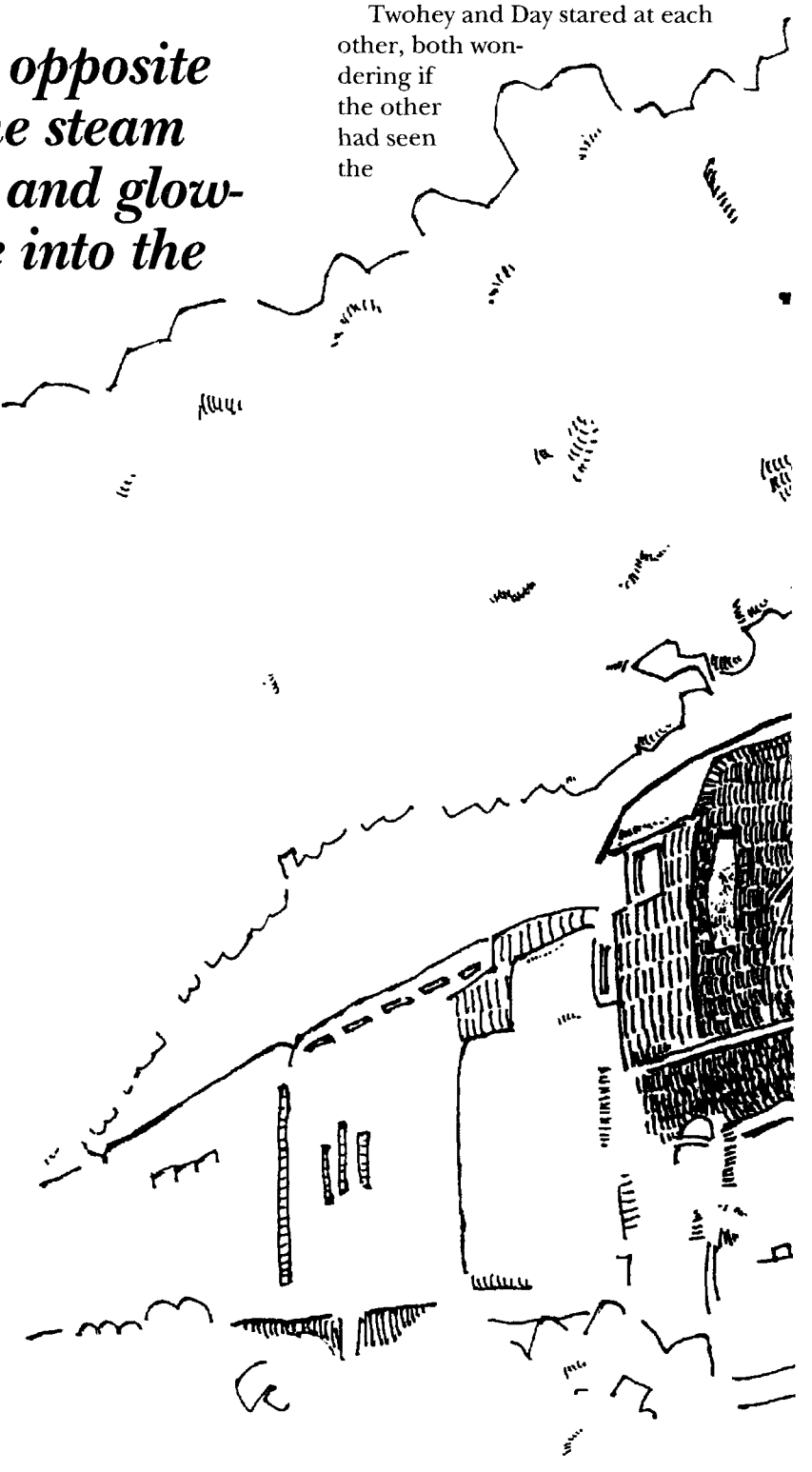
An open firebox on the opposite engine was "playing the steam plume from the pops," and glowing an ominous orange into the prairie night.

Day had just recently passed his Engineer's exams, but was still shoveling coal as he awaited "a job on the right side of the engine." Two miles east of town, they "hit the first high cutback, swinging around to the right, then to the left on a pretty tight curve," where the pair saw the sight that plagues the nightmares of every trainman. On the single track ahead of them, loomed the headlamp of another approaching locomotive. Day thought that "the headlight of the approaching train seemed to be about the size of a wagon wheel." An open firebox on the opposite engine was "playing the steam plume from the pops," and glowing an ominous orange into the prairie night.

Apparently, switch communications had broke down once again, and all that was left was for Twohey and Day to set brakes to soften the imminent crash and abandon ship before the two engines hit. "This is it! Bob, hold her!" Day shouted from the gangplank at the door waiting to jump, as Twohey grasped for the brake valve. "Twohey reached for the brake valve and throttle and I made for the gangway, turning to see what he was doing." But before they could leap, even more astonishing events froze their feet, and their nerves. "He stopped his reach just before touching either brake or throttle."

The approaching train shrieked a warning whistle, and then casually bypassed Twohey and Day's engine, and continued on its way around the curve. The train crewmen held their breath as the other train passed through a junction that did not exist, on tracks that weren't there! "This was a single track but that phantom breezed past us like lightning!" Opposing crew members stood and "waved to Bob," the traditional railroader's greeting, as a string of lighted passenger coaches rushed by, their windows full of people. Then as fast as it appeared, the train rounded the bend and out of sight.

Twohey and Day stared at each other, both wondering if the other had seen the



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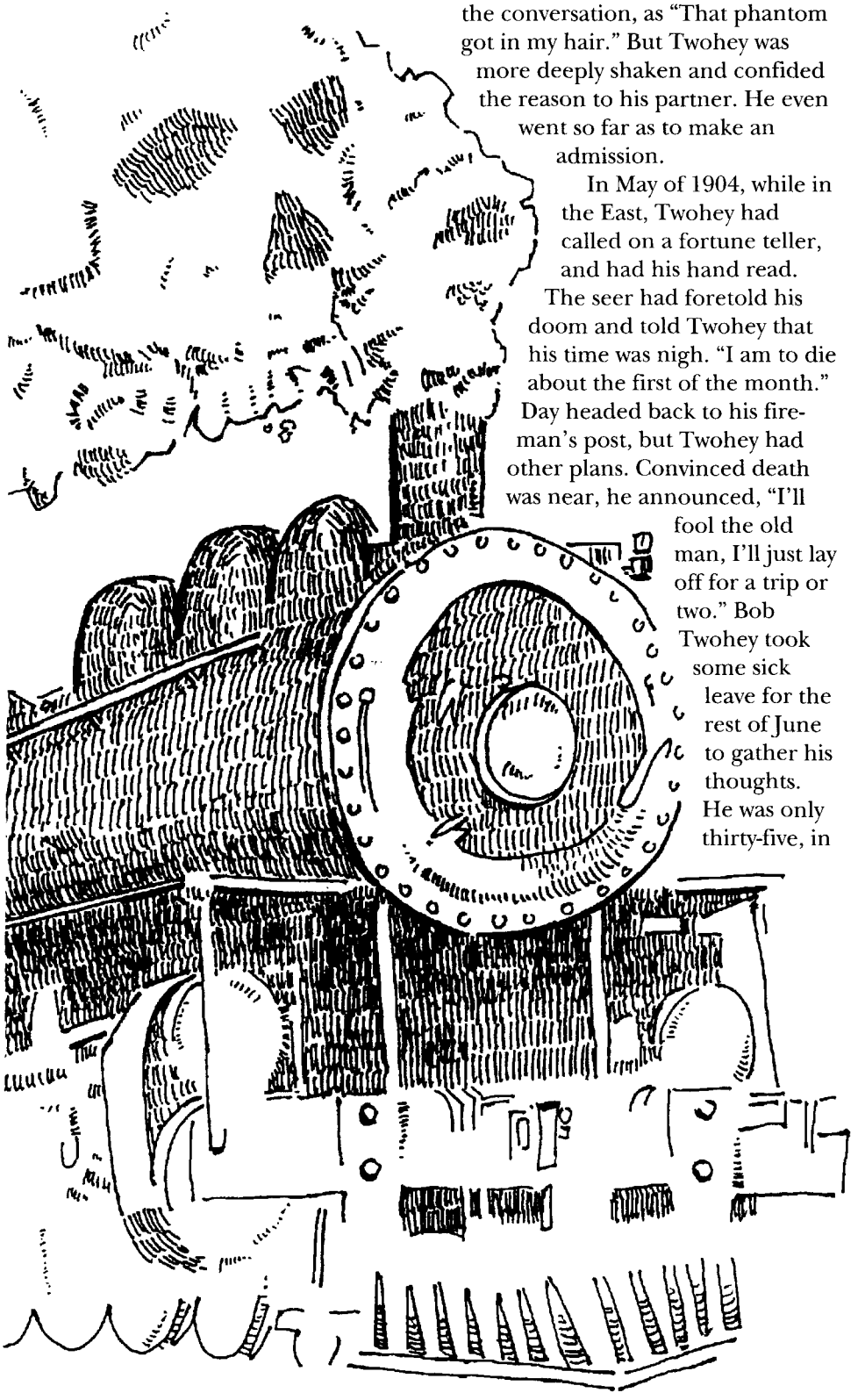
vision. "I didn't like to say anything to Bob. He looked at me, then turned his attention to the track ahead." Neither wanted to speak first, and neither said a word as they resumed their posts and carried on to Dunmore. As planned they coupled to the Flyer, continued to Fort Macleod, and returned to Medicine Hat without incident. Neither spoke of the spectacle for days.

Two weeks passed before Bob Twohey and Gus Day met up with each other on the street and over a beer, both finally felt comfortable enough to discuss their shared experience. Twohey asked "Did you see that train?" Day "replied in the affirmative" and was visibly relieved for the conversation, as "That phantom got in my hair." But Twohey was more deeply shaken and confided the reason to his partner. He even went so far as to make an admission.

In May of 1904, while in the East, Twohey had called on a fortune teller, and had his hand read. The seer had foretold his doom and told Twohey that his time was nigh. "I am to die about the first of the month." Day headed back to his fireman's post, but Twohey had other plans. Convinced death was near, he announced, "I'll fool the old man, I'll just lay off for a trip or two." Bob Twohey took some sick leave for the rest of June to gather his thoughts. He was only thirty-five, in the prime of life, active in his union and civic affairs, and besides, he had a wife and children to think about.



Day was back on the same engine and tender on July 6, and in Twohey's absence, forty-five-year-old James Nicholson was at the throttle. Nicholson and Day were doing the same job, taking a new engine to meet the Spokane Flyer at Dunmore. At the exact same curve, Day "happened to look out and boy!—there was Mr. Phantom coming full tilt, plume from the 'pops', all as vivid as before." Nicholson exclaimed, "What the hell's THAT?" Gus Day knew what it was. As in the first instance, a crash seemed to loom, when once again the phantom passed by the engine, the crew waved again, and the trains lights burned brightly before disappearing from sight.

This time, Gus Day truly was spooked, and a couple of days later was assigned to operate a track switch engine in the Medicine Hat yards. The station operator, H.B. Ritchie, was himself a little frazzled, having pulled four days of twelve-hour shifts after the accidental drowning of a fellow operator. The morning of July 8, 1908, James Nicholson and a new fireman, Harry Thompson, were given their orders to take Light Engine No. 703 to Dunmore and couple with the Spokane Flyer, this time to take it east to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Nicholson had been in poor health, and comrades tried to persuade him not to take the run. Perhaps his illness, and his friends' warning were a manifestation of the ghost sighting. In the daylight hours, operator Ritchie gave the clearance, and Nicholson and Thompson left Medicine Hat station on their new assignment.

As the engine rounded the hill, fireman Thompson looked up to see a farmer standing on top of a hill waving frantically. Puzzled, Thompson waved back. After all, it was customary for folks to wave at bypassing trains as a greeting, or a "hi-ball," a go ahead signal. Before long, Thompson realized the farmer was trying to do more than say hello.

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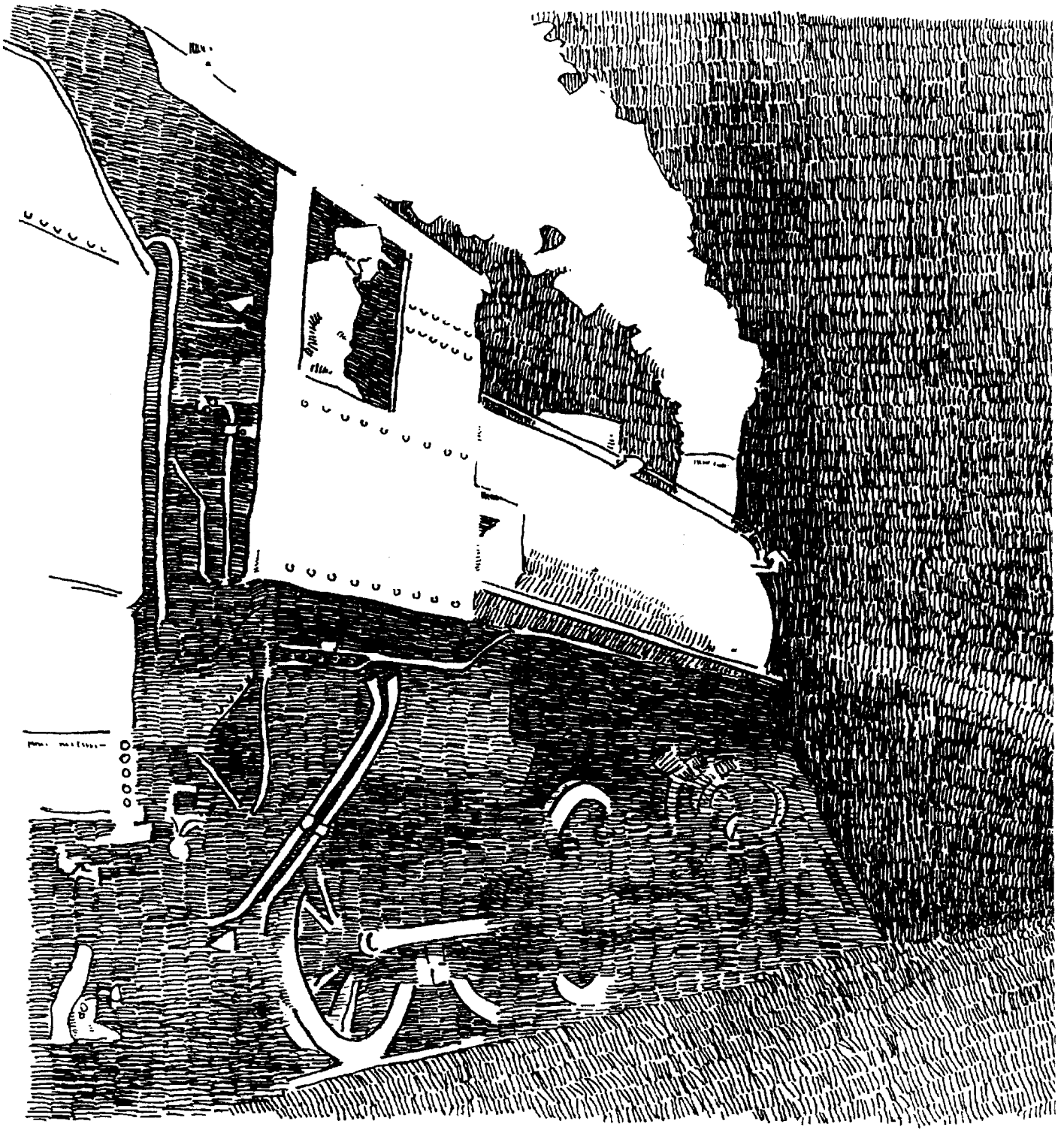

At 8:20 AM, a hundred yards before the spot where the phantom trains had previously made their appearance, another train appeared before them on the tracks.

But this was no ghost. Thompson, having no experience with the sightings and now realizing the meaning of the farmer's warning, jumped from the engine. As brakes screamed on the rails, two very real engines struck head-on in a horrific grinding collision. The light engine was ripped right off the front tracks. Thompson saved his own life, escaping with a scalded hand, but James Nicholson was killed instantly, leaving four daughters and a widow.

The opposing unit was Engine No. 514, pulling the inbound morning passenger train from Lethbridge to Medicine Hat, Train No 17. The express car, the mail and baggage car, and a tourist car were "telescoped," forced into each other until they were beyond recognition as they rolled onto their sides, sucked over by the engine. The passenger cars were cushioned from the impact somewhat by two cars of fruit that were directly behind the engine.

Seven people lost their lives in the wreck, including two passengers from Bow Island, James Shaw and Duncan McEachran. The two train

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crews took the brunt of the casualties. A mortally wounded conductor, Phillip Millet, lay in the bushes dying. This was his first run on a passenger train. Fireman Howard Gray and baggageman W.J. Archambault were killed instantly. It was the identity of the engineer of No. 514 that endows this train story with its aura of the supernatural.

The engineer of the opposing passenger daily was none other than Bob Twohey, the bewildered engineer who first saw the phantom, marked for death by the fortune teller. For whatever reason, forces had intervened to show Bob Twohey a premonition of his own final departure. But accepting another assignment had not helped him cheat doom.

Rescuers soon came up from town in a relief train. Harry Thompson, racked by survivor guilt, "shaken and a bit bloody," refused attention for his scalded hand until he couldn't stand it. Bob Twohey was lifted into a wagon, being too badly busted up to be put on the rescue train. Perfectly conscious during his attention, Twohey finally succumbed to his wounds, and fulfilled his destiny in a Medicine Hat hospital.

In Medicine Hat, businesses closed and flags were lowered to half-mast. All of the dead crew had been residents of the town. In the end, an inquest laid the blame at the feet of H.B. Ritchie, the station operator, who'd given Nicholson warnings for trains No. 74 and 76, but failed to mention No. 17. The station was shorthanded, and in his fatigue, Ritchie gave Nicholson's engine full clearance for the distance to Dunmore. In addition, Nicholson seemed to have neglected to check the train register. The *Calgary Herald* said "To the ordinary mortal it would seem this awful mortality could be lessened." Human error was to be the blame, with no mention or forgiveness for phantom train sightings. The discredited Ritchie was taking no chances and skipped across the nearby United States border before he could be arrested.

"Every railway man believes that a bad wreck is followed by other smaller accidents," said *The Medicine Hat Times*. Sure enough, over the next week following the Dunmore wreck, other incidents occurred on various points along the line. Results varied from amputations to rear-enders to derailments, but no deaths resulted from any of them.

Eventually the ghost story came to light, as Gus Day told the story privately to Andy Staysko, a fellow trainman from Lethbridge. In 1953, a trade union magazine, the *Locomotive Engineer*, ran a story about a similar phantom train in Colorado. Day, by then retired to Victoria, British Columbia, read the story and tempered by the passage of time, publicly told his own spooky tale to a Vancouver newspaperman, C.F. Moriarty, in the comfortable confines of Victoria's Union Club. Moriarty himself, could speak of the Dunmore wreck with some authority. Ironically, on that terrible day in 1908, he himself had been a telegrapher with the Canadian Pacific Railroad in Calgary and had handled the company's press release about the collision.

The haunted engineers, Twohey and Nicholson, both having seen their "Flying Dutchman" on the railroad tracks of Medicine Hat, in the face of their own doom acted coolly and professionally according to Moriarty's release. "Without a doubt both engineers could have saved themselves had they thought only of themselves. Twohey had time to have jumped and left his train, but instead he jumped back into his cab and put on every brake before he thought of himself. He died for his train, as the couple of seconds necessary for applying the brakes would have put him out of danger. Nicholson had almost the same chance as Twohey. Both engines after the wreck showed all brakes applied. Both engineers died at their posts rather than jump to save themselves." Robert Twohey and James Nicholson faced their Ghost Trains from Hell, and met their destiny, as in the old gospel hymn:

Life is like a mountain railway,
With an engineer that's brave,
You must make your run successful,
From the cradle to the grave.
Watch the hills, the curves,
the tunnels,
Never falter, never fail,
Keep your hands upon the throttle,
And your eyes upon the rail.

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Oklahoma's Mysterious FRONTIER

From *Mysterious Oklahoma, Eerie True Tales from the Sooner State*

By David A. Farris • Illustrated By Larry Willis

Everyone loves a good ghost story. It certainly seems like most people know at least one they think may be true, and the closer one feels to a person or place involved with the story, the more real it becomes.

My two favorite subjects to research and write about are the western frontier and the unexplained. Every now and again I will come across a story covering both of these topics. Oklahoma is alive with spooky, unexplained tales that have become part of Sooner State folklore. These ghostly tales are some of the best (and scariest) I've ever heard. These are the ones you think about when you're all alone, listening to the night wind blowing through the trees. Some ghost stories are just too good to save until Halloween.

Ghostly tales from the Cherokee Nation predate statehood, like the one told about a Virginia aristocrat George H. Murrell. Murrell and his Cherokee wife lived in the area around Park Hill before the Civil War. This is the same area he used to fox hunt in the company of friends and hounds. One night during such a hunt the hounds seemed hot on the trail of something they could not seem to overtake. One of the members of the hunting party

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was a newspaperman named S.W. Ross. In 1937 he retold the story of that hunt to the Indian-Pioneer Papers, an oral history of frontier times. "From their excited baying the fast running animals were apparently quite near their object of pursuit," said Ross.

Murrell and his friend James E. Latta were riding onto the pack's trail.

"Major Murrell and Mr. Latta were close together, and upon coming near to the hounds, saw running at great speed, immediately in front of the foremost hounds, a dwarf-like being with long black hair streaming in the early breeze run on a short distance and then suddenly vanished, leaving no trace nor track. Immediately the hounds lay down, panting and weary," Ross added.

The men stood in awe, unable to believe their eyes. Murrell took it all in stride, however, saying, "There are some things we do not understand."

Old structures and other types of settlements are likely to acquire a ghost or two as time goes by, including the dusty old ruins of Fort Washita. Located in the Madill-Durant area, Fort Washita was established in 1842 and captured by the Confederacy during the Civil War. The ruins are said to be haunted by the ghost of a headless woman known as Aunt Jane or Aunt Betsy. As the story goes, the ghost was once an early settler killed by robbers.

After the war, the old fort was burned and abandoned. Charles Colbert, a Chickasaw Indian, was lucky enough to be awarded the old site as part of his land allotment from the Chickasaw Nation. The main barracks were rebuilt into a home for his family and thirty-two dogs. The first night the family moved the dogs disappeared. Colbert spent the next day rounding them up, but the next morning they were gone again. This was enough to convince the Colberts to move back to their town house in the city and rent the new home to unsuspecting renters.

One of the tenants who witnessed ghostly goings on was a doctor named Steele. His sister, who kept house for him, suffered a nervous breakdown from the things she saw. She complained about seeing a woman in the house without a head. Dr. Steele told an early settler named L.L. Sturdivant about a spooky encounter.

According to Sturdivant, "He was alone in the house one night and he was reading a paper. He heard a voice say, 'There's nobody home but just you and me.' On a chair near him sat a big black cat with yellow eyes.

"Dr. Steele said he ran until he was out of breath, but whenever he stopped, there was the cat saying something to him again."

The Steeles moved away.

Accounts of even earlier sightings spread throughout the area. Mrs. N.P. McMinn lived at Fort Washita with her husband, who was stationed there during the Civil War. From time to time the McMinns would return to the fort while traveling. It was during one of these visits in 1898 that Mrs. McMinn met a woman who lived in the ruins of the old fort. She told Mrs. McMinn the story of a terrifying ghostly encounter that occurred one night after supper. The woman was in the kitchen washing dishes when she heard the strange, but familiar, sound of a stone rolling down the roof, stopping at the eaves. She paused from her dishwashing and noticed a silvery-white headless figure in the doorway who said to her, "Follow me and I will reward you."

The terrified woman screamed and replied, "I can't, I can't," before fainting. Her husband rushed into the kitchen to find his wife unconscious on the floor.

Stories like these keep the old fort area enshrouded in mystery. Ghost-hunting parties have visited the site hoping for (perhaps dreading) a glimpse of the headless frontier woman.

Major Murrell and Mr. Latta were close together, and upon coming near to the hounds, saw running at great speed, immediately in front of the foremost hounds, a dwarf-like being with long black hair streaming in the early breeze...

In the countryside surrounding Stillwater is a spooky spot known as Ghost Hollow. In the late 1800s, the old elm and sycamore trees in the area were ideal for hanging outlaws. According to local legend, an innocent man was hanged from an elm tree during the year 1887. The next day, the tree lost all its bark. Since that night, the tree glows an eerie white color in the full moon. This ghost story is a favorite because it combines all the right elements: cowboys, frontier justice, and a lonely, spook field. The legend of Ghost Hollow embraces the true western flavor of Oklahoma's wilder past.

For anyone who would like to visit a ghost from Oklahoma's frontier past, but wouldn't want to live with one, Guthrie's Stone Lion Inn fits the bill. Built in 1907, just after statehood, the mansion has been used as a home, funeral parlor, and ultimately, a charming bed and

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Even though the toys and games were neatly put away and the door locked, the closet's contents would be found scattered on the floor the next morning.

breakfast, featuring fine dining and murder mystery weekends. After a while, it became known for reasons the innkeepers did not intend.

In 1986, Becky Luker bought the mansion and, with the help of her two sons, Grant and Ral, converted the mansion into a cozy, romantic getaway. Soon after moving in, the Lukers began hearing the ghostly pitter-patter of little feet, as well as the mysterious sound of a door being opened and closed. After several responses from police yielded no burglary suspects, the family slowly began to accept a more supernatural answer. Two specific areas of ghostly activity are the back staircase between the hours of ten o'clock and midnight, and a big closet on the third floor where the youngest son, Ral, kept his toys. Even though the toys and games were neatly put away and the door locked, the closet's contents would be found scattered on the floor the next morning.

After a while, the Lukers were fortunate enough to be paid a visit by the home's original occupants. Now quite elderly, the trio of Houghton siblings recounted tales from their childhood in order to shed light on the mansion's murky past. F.E. Houghton built the mansion in 1907, where he lived with his family. Although there were many good memories, the Houghtons told of a sibling who had died. When their sister, Augusta, was eight years old, she had contracted whooping cough. A negligent night maid had given her the wrong kind of medicine, causing Augusta to become violently ill, then die.

Could it be the ghost of Augusta Houghton climbing the back staircase, late at night, to play in the toy closet? As the Houghtons would confirm, the Luker boy's toy closet was the same one used by the Houghton children to store their toys, decades earlier. Before her death, Augusta and her siblings would wait until the adults were asleep, then climb the back staircase to the toy room and play. This would usually happen between ten o'clock and midnight, the same time the Lukers reported hearing prowlers. The similarities in this case could send a chill down the spine of even the most hard-core of skeptics. In a televised interview, Becky Luker told of four guests who said they were awakened by a hand patting them on the face, but would open their eyes to find no one there. The ghost doesn't seem to invoke a feeling of terror (like say for example, a headless frontier woman or a talking black cat), but this may be because no one has actually seen her.

One of the strangest stories from the Sooner frontier didn't involve ghosts, just toads.

As incredible as it may sound, the phenomenon of the skies raining toads, fish, frogs, and other organic material is very rare; however, it is known to have occurred. Some people think a tornado sucking up a pond could be the reason for these strange events. If that were the case, then the skies would rain all types of aquatic debris, and not just one species. Others speculate the witnesses are actually seeing a hard rain causing toads to come up from the ground; however, in this story, that doesn't seem to be the case.

One such story comes from a gentleman who drove a team of "broomtails" on a mail wagon in Beaver County from 1908 to 1916. This tale took place sometime in late October 1912, during "one unusually sultry evening." William W. Bathlot was about a mile from the Floris post office. He could see the black rain clouds filling the sky and noticed the heaviest, darkest area seemed to be directly overhead. A bit later, objects he took to be hail began hitting the mail wagon. Bathlot told fate magazine, "In amazement I gazed at the thousands of small objects spraying

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"I held my hand out of the wagon window and caught four fat, brown little toads all about the size of my thumbnail. Each was perfect, with legs and no tail."

downward from the roof of the wagon and from the backs of my horses. They bounced up from the sandy soil like little rubber balls, lay stunned upon the ground for a few seconds and then flopped over on their stomachs as lively as you please. Among this myriad of small creatures I failed to see one killed or crippled from the fall. For some unknown reason they all landed on their backs, thus protecting their little, soft, white bellies. I could peer outward for perhaps 100 feet through the falling rain and as far as I could see the top of the earth was alive with little creatures. I held my hand out of the wagon window and caught four, fat, brown, little toads all about the size of my thumbnail. Each was perfect, with legs and no tail.

"I had heard of fish and frogs falling from the clouds but I never had heard of a fall of toads. And these real honest-to-goodness baby toads were coming down upon the wagon top and upon the backs of my horses instead of coming upward out of the earth."

The toads fell for about three minutes, but the rain continued in torrents. When Bathlot reached the post office, he found the shower of toads had fallen there too and just a little beyond. As close as anyone could tell, the toads fell in an area about a mile long and a quarter mile wide.

Another strange element Bathlot noted was that by October most toads should be almost full grown, whereas these were babies. Wherever the toads came from, it would seem they were out of sync with their regular growth cycle.

Could it be that these stories reside only in the minds of the people who tell them? Oklahoma is a state with a rich and wild history. So much so, it's bound to be haunted, either in reality, or in the minds of the people who know its colorful past.

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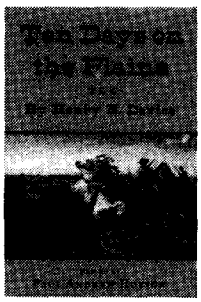

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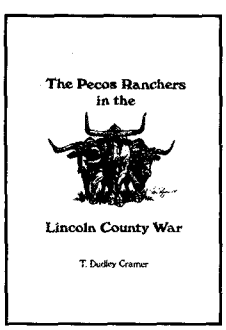

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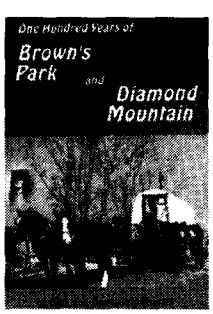

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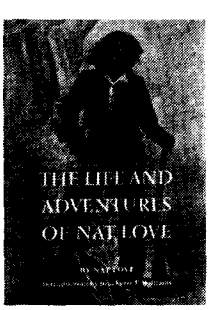

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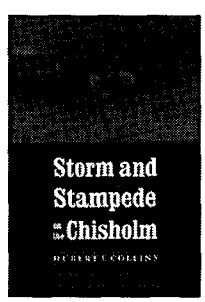

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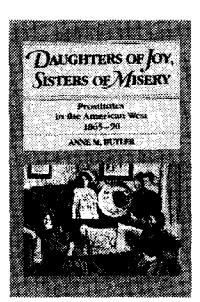

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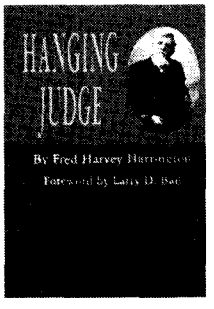

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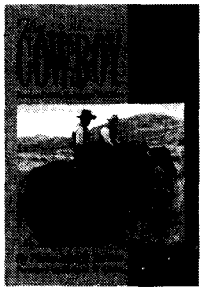

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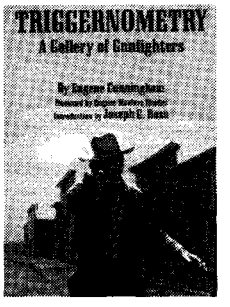

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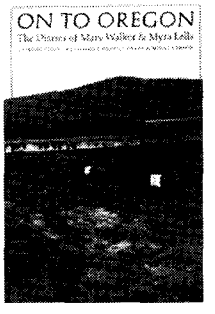

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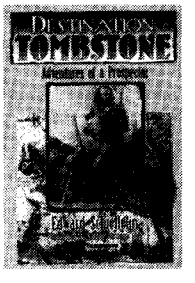

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The Kid: A Photographic Essay

The West of Billy the Kid. By Frederick Nolan. (University of Oklahoma Press, 1005 Asp Avenue, Norman, OK 73019. 368 pages, bibliography, index, notes, illustrations, and maps. $39.95 Cloth.)

Frederick Nolan's book, *The Lincoln County War—A Documentary History,* is as comprehensive as anything that has ever been written about that legendary fracas in 1870s New Mexico. Nolan's always meticulous research inevitably shines through, illuminating much of what was to his readers. This, along with his entertaining writing style, make anything he writes the subject of much discussion and anticipation.

Well, Fred has done it again. His latest work, *The West of Billy the Kid,* bears all of the trademarks mentioned above. In addition, there is an impressive gallery of photographs to keep the reader visually stimulated.

People the world over have been fascinated by the Lincoln County War's most famous participant, Billy the Kid, almost since the moment of his death on July 14, 1881. No one has ever been able to quite explain this phenomenon, but as is usually the case in things concerning Billy, Nolan comes the closest. He also appears to be closing in on the Kid's mysterious origins.

Billy's birthplace and early years have confounded historians for a century. New York, Indiana, and Kansas have all been cited at one time or another. For what may be the first time, there is a coherent, easily followed narrative that sheds new light on this confusing piece of Americana.

Mr. Nolan has spent some forty-odd years researching Billy and the Lincoln County War and is as familiar with the Kid and the men who rode both with and against him as anyone alive. And, as is usually the case in any historical project that this gifted writer undertakes, the back of the book contains voluminous notes—just in case you were wondering what his sources were, or even if you have any questions!

Despite the fact that he is arguably the most famous western character that America ever produced, there is much that is unknown about Billy, which may have something to do with the world-wide obsession with the Kid that has been steadily growing for the past 117 years. With the publication of this new work by Frederick Nolan, the Kid—personable, charming, and deadly—comes a little more out of the shadows of history and into historical focus. As Nolan states in the preface to the book, it is "an attempt...to reach back across the century and try to see the life and the West of Billy the Kid as it truly was 120 years ago, when what is now our history was his tomorrow."

This book is more than just an "attempt." To anyone with a grain of imagination, it is a window to the past. It is a clearer look at the young man who has fired our collective imagination for over a century. For the first time, Billy's sunny face seems to be peering directly at us out of the mists of time and history.

And we can thank Fred Nolan for it.—*Drew Gomber, Lincoln, New Mexico.*

Lone Star Battles

Civil War in Texas and New Mexico Territory. By Steve Cottrell. (Pelican Publishing Company, 1101 Monroe St., Gretna, LA 70053. 141 pages. $9.95 Paper.)

The Civil War in the Southwest was unique in a number of ways. Just eleven days before Fort Sumpter was fired upon, Colonel John "Rip" Ford's cavalry practically wiped out a bothersome Mexican column that

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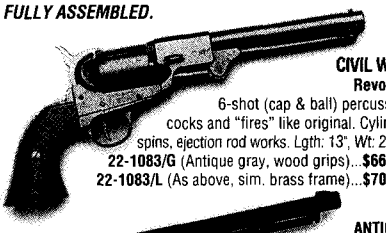

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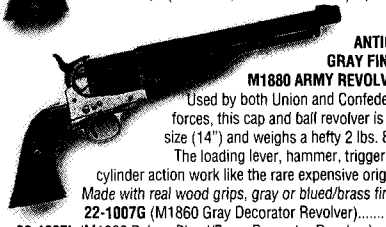

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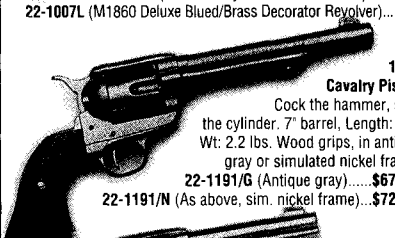

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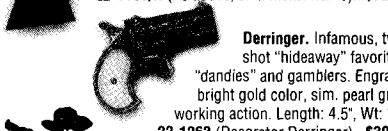

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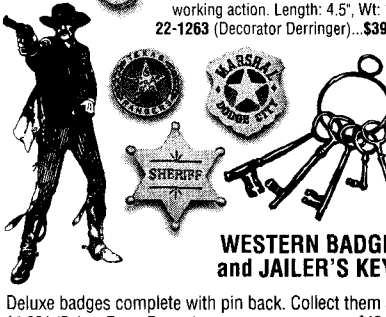

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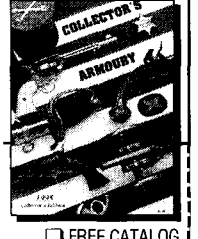

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had challenged Ford's spanking-new Confederate authority.

Though Grant and Lee had closed up shop at Appomattox on April 9, 1865, the scrappy Confederates of the West were still throwing lead as late as May 12, 1865, when they gobbled up 113 Federals at Palmito ranch.

Civil War in Texas and New Mexico Territory, by Steve Cottrell, the third in his series highlighting the Great Rebellion west of the Mississippi is filled with skirmishes, strategies, and colorful fighting men.

But not everyone favored secession at first. Sam Houston, a hot-headed rebel in his salad days, was faced with the bitter task of trying to keep Texas in the old Union. Voted out of office March 2, Texas Independence Day, Sam packed his bags and went into exile in Huntsville.

The first year was mainly noted for a raid into New Mexico Territory by Lieutenant Colonel John Baylor's 250 Texas troopers. There they besieged Fort Fillmore on July 21 only to be surrounded by a sudden attack from the fort. But, barricaded in the nearby town of Mesilla, their stiff resistance panicked the Yanks, who skedaddled!

The first battle of the new year at Valverde on February 21 saw one of the few times when bayonets were used to deadly effect in that war. When two companies of Texas cavalry charged a body of Colorado volunteers with their lances, they were speared from the saddle by the volunteers' bayonets.

But that murderous encounter was swallowed up in the major fighting at Valverde between Union troops and Confederates. Who finally gave up and retreated.

Throughout the rest of 1862, Texas forces fought seven more engagements, winning the majority of those contests. The following year saw a total of three pitched battles. Confederate Major General "Prince" John Magruder celebrated New Year's Day by a land and sea operation that broke the Union stranglehold on the strategic port of Galveston.

In November it was turn-about as the Confederate Fort Esperanza on the Gulf was bombarded into surrender by Union gunboats. But Texas forces in 1864 still followed the Stars and Bars in a series of fights that sputtered along the Rio Grande from Laredo in April to Las Rucias Ranch in July and Brownsville at month's end. Yet the war was grinding down while hard times and near-starvation stalked the Lone Star State, for without able-bodied men to work the fields, crops were scant. And a great unrest among Native Americans added to the turmoil, as both the Kiowa and Kickapoo tribes were on the move—mainly heading toward Mexico.

Sam Houston, the man who'd tried to ward his fellow Texans against the war, died a broken hearted old patriot in July 1863; yet the great Texas legacy of military feats of courage, often against great odds deserve to be remembered.

Steve Cottrell's well-illustrated book gives the reader an adventurous and historically accurate look at a neglected theater of the War Between the States.—*Bill Garwood, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.*

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WYATT AT THE WHEEL?

Most readers are familiar with the photograph of Wyatt Earp standing alongside a Ford Model T automobile. Frequently it is pointed out that the photograph gives the viewer an idea of Wyatt's stature and height. I have asked several Earp enthusiasts if Wyatt Earp ever obtained a driver's license. Undoubtedly he could drive the Ford, but did he have a license? And was a license required by law during Wyatt Earp's lifetime? If a reader can provide us with that information, quite a few people would be pleased.

Another Short

Luke Short is a household name, gaining fame on his own, as well as being friends to Earp and Bat Masterson. Mel Pritchett, Grannis, Arkansas, inquires about the lesser known Ed Short. Mr. Pritchett had no luck in finding out why, after Ed was killed, his remains were sent back to Indiana.

Charles Edwin Short was born at his grandfather Short's home in New Marion, Indiana, on October 27, 1864. He was the son of Charles Cassel and Lucinda (Mink) Short, the only son and oldest of four children. He was called Ed to distinguish him from his father.

The parents had been married in Osgood, Indiana, and apparently they lived out their lives there. The father preceded Ed in death. When Ed was killed in the gunfight with "Black Faced" Charley Bryant of the Dalton-Doolin gang, his remains were sent back to the family home. His mother and sisters met the train carrying Ed Short's body. He is buried in the Glendale Cemetery in Osgood. The marker reads: "Charles E. Short Son of C. & L. Short Died Aug. 23, 1891 Aged 26 yrs. 9 mos. 26 days."

The most complete resource on Ed Short remains a chapter in Mark Dugan's book, *Tales Never Told Around the Campfire: True Stories of Frontier America,* published by Swallow Press, Athens, Ohio, 1992.

Dugan was able to locate a photograph of Ed Short, perhaps the only one in existence, and it appears in his book, along with a photograph of Short's grave, an artist's interpretation of the attempted arrest of Bryant by Short, and other relevant illustrations. Charles Bryant

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was killed by Short in the gunfight, each one killing the other. Bryant's remains, delivered to the Schaeffer Undertaking Parlor in Caldwell, Kansas, were claimed by relatives from Decatur, Texas. Fortunately for outlaw buffs, a photograph of the dead Bryant also appears in Dugan's book. There are a number of Bryants buried in the Decatur cemetery, but there is no known marker for Charles Bryant.

Branding: Round II

A few issues back I fielded a question dealing with the custom of branding humans in the United States. It was not unusual for slaves to be branded, and also soldiers for desertion, but I had few details. Thanks to reader William Klette of Carson City, Nevada, we learn that it was practiced at least as late as 1872.

Mr. Klette sent a copy of a Special Order issued by Major-General Schofield at San Francisco, California, dated September 11, 1872. The special order was to the effect that Private Washington Merryman of Troop I, First Cavalry, was sentenced to be "indelibly marked on the left hip with the letter "D," which marked him for life as a deserter. The brand was to be 1-1/2 inches long. In addition he had to forfeit all pay and allowances then due and serve two years at hard labor, while wearing a twelve-pound ball attached to his leg by a four-foot long chain. At his dishonorable discharge he would be given $30. Considering the punishment, there must have been more involved than just a simple desertion—as one would think the branding and loss of pay would be sufficient punishment for the crime. But as we all know, the army knew best, even in 1872!

Bill Moore, A Non-Outlaw?

Becky Patlan, a reader from Fayetteville, Arkansas, writes that she has lived in Arkansas for quite a while, but is a native of Arizona.

"While I was growing up in Arizona we celebrated a holiday called Billy Moore Days. My father told me that he was an outlaw, but

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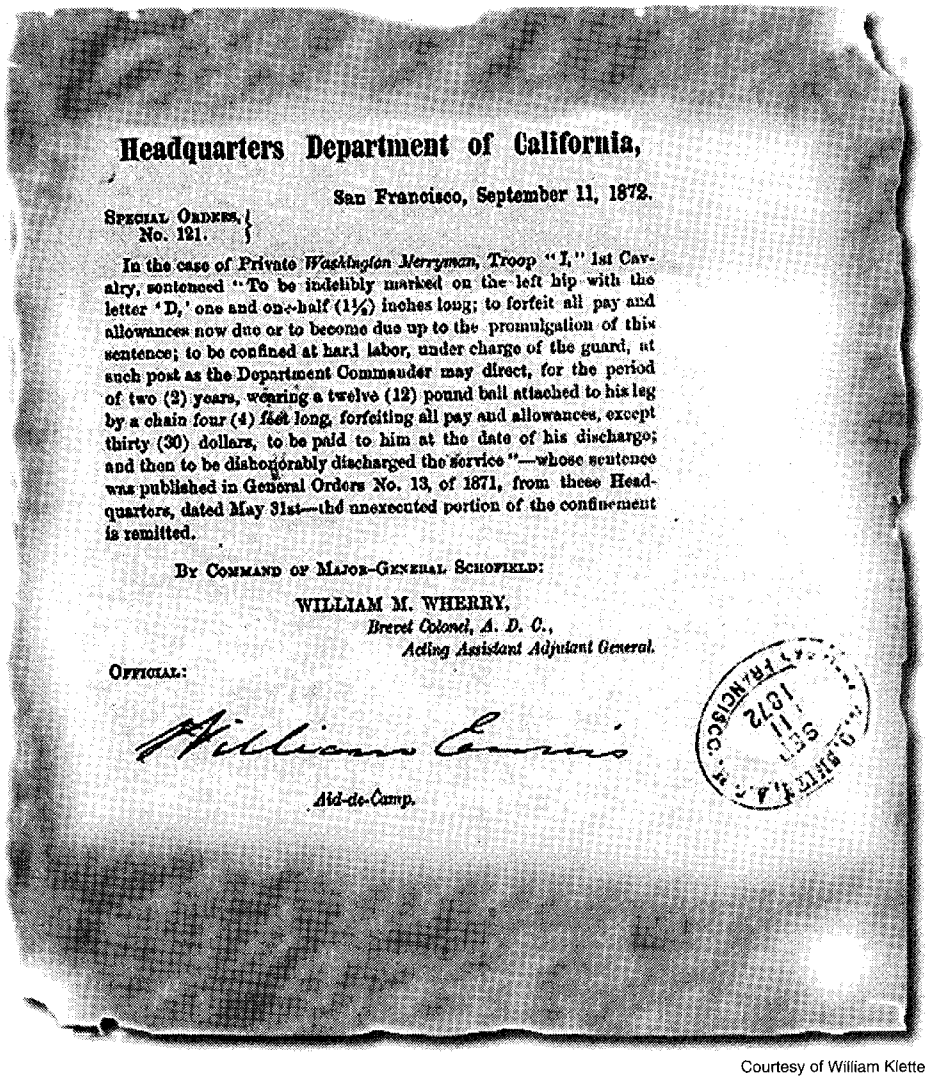

Headquarters Department of California,

San Francisco, September 11, 1872.

SPECIAL ORDERS, No. 121.

In the case of Private *Washington Merryman*, Troop "I," 1st Cavalry, sentenced "To be indelibly marked on the left hip with the letter 'D,' one and one-half (1½) inches long; to forfeit all pay and allowances now due or to become due up to the promulgation of this sentence; to be confined at hard labor, under charge of the guard, at such post as the Department Commander may direct, for the period of two (2) years, wearing a twelve (12) pound ball attached to his leg by a chain four (4) feet long, forfeiting all pay and allowances, except thirty (30) dollars, to be paid to him at the date of his discharge; and then to be dishonorably discharged the service"—whose sentence was published in General Orders No. 13, of 1871, from these Headquarters, dated May 31st—the unexecuted portion of the confinement is remitted.

BY COMMAND OF MAJOR-GENERAL SCHOFIELD:

WILLIAM M. WHERRY,
Brevet Colonel, A. D. C.,
Acting Assistant Adjutant General.

OFFICIAL:

William Emmis

Aid-de-Camp.

Courtesy of William Klette

Army Special Orders No. 121, sentencing one Private Washington Merryman to be branded for the crime of desertion.

nobody could give me any specifics. Does anyone know about this man or know where I can get information on him?"

Well, there probably was more than one Bill Moore in the Southwest, but the best known is William C. Moore, known best as "Outlaw Bill" Moore. There is one book about this Moore, entitled *William C. Moore: Good Guy or Outlaw Bill?* written by Frank H. Slaven, Jr. The author's grandmother was Jennie F. Wright, who married William C. Moore on August 18, 1881. One description called him a "prominent cattle man from the Panhandle of Texas."

According to Slaven, Moore arrived at the LX Ranch in Texas in the fall of 1877 and being ambitious, became manager rather quickly. In the spring of 1883 Moore bought an interest in the American Valley Ranch. Internal problems soon erupted during the following year, cattle theft increased, and two homesteaders were found murdered. Indictments were handed down for Moore and several others, but no one was ever convicted for the murders.

Slaven believes that most of the stories about Moore being an outlaw had their origin in the range classic by Charles A. Siringo, *A Texas Cowboy,* first published in 1885. Siringo mentions Moore and apparently considered him an honest man. In 1919 Siringo brought out *A Lone Star Cowboy,* relating how Moore was wanted for murder in several states. In 1927 Siringo's *Riata and Spurs* was published and identi-

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fied Moore as the man who killed the two homesteaders in American Valley.

In the same year Jim East, another former LX Ranch cowboy and associate of Siringo, produced his life story in which he described Moore as a cattle thief, stealing from the LX Ranch. Apparently East was influenced by Siringo's writings.

Whether the outlaw Billy Moore celebrated in Arizona has any connection with the William C. Moore identified as "Outlaw Bill" Moore is uncertain.

Sostenes L'Archeveque

James Vasquez of Lubbock, Texas, inquires about a Mexican outlaw, Sostenes L'Archeveque. Thanks to the research of Philip J. Rasch a little bit of knowledge has been preserved. This horse thief and murderer roamed the Texas Panhandle and parts of New Mexico in the 1870s. On January 20, 1877, he murdered the Casner brothers near Palos Duros, Texas, due to the belief that the Casners had considerable gold coin in their possession.

Shortly thereafter, L'Archeveque was taken by surprise and stabbed and shot to death by Felix Gurules, Miguel Garcia, and Nicolas Martinez, his brother-in-law. L'Archeveque claimed to have killed twenty-three white men; although this claim is perhaps as false as the twenty-one men allegedly killed by Billy the Kid.

Rasch's account of the Casner brothers killing differs from the account in Clarence Ray Wharton's pamphlet, *L'Archeveque,* published in 1941 by the Anson Jones Press of Houston, Texas, but Rasch based his article on primary research. It appeared in June 1967 in *The Branding Iron* of the Los Angeles Westerners Corral.

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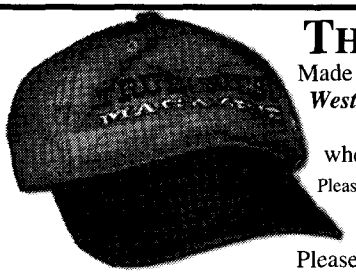

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